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GUY DE MAUPASSANT

BEL-AMI

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
JEAN HENRI CHEVALIER



SUSIL GUPTA

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To
S. K. S.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I

WHEN the cashier had handed him the change for his hundred-cent piece Georges Duroy strolled out of the restaurant.

By nature and pose the typical ex-Sergeant Major, he swung his cane, twisted his moustache with characteristic military swagger and cast a quick comprehensive glance on the lingering diners, the glance of an adventurer sprading himself out like a net.

The women had turned towards him, three little working women, a middle aged music teacher, slovenly, untidy with an invariably dusty hat and perpetually ill fitting dress, and two bourgeois with their husbands, regular customers of this chop-house with its fixed charges.

Actually on the move he halted a moment and asked himself what he was to do next. Here he was on the 28th June and in his pocket precisely three francs and forty centimes to finish the month with. That represented two dinners without lunches or two lunches without dinners at his option. He reflected that the lunches being twenty-two sous instead of thirty which the dinners would cost him, by contenting himself with the lunches he would have a surplus of one franc fifty centimes which would cover two snacks of bread and sausage plus two bocks upon the boulevard. That was his happy hunting ground, his nightly pleasure haunt; so he started off down to la rue Notre Dame-de-Lorette. He walked or rather marched as he did when he wore his Hussars uniform, chest out, legs a little apart as if just dismounted, striding along the crowded street brutally, jostling shoulders, thrusting aside everyone in his way. He wore his rather shabby top hat at a jaunty angle and tapped the pavement smartly with his heels. He gave the impression of continuously defying someone—the passers-by, the houses, the whole city by this indefinable air of the good soldier come down to the mere civilian. Although dressed at a total outlay of sixty francs he possessed a certain rakish distinction, a little on the vulgar side but real enough none the less. Tall, well made, blond reddish chestnut hair,

trim, turned up moustache which seemed to effervesce on his lip, blue eyes, naturally curly hair parted down the middle, he might well be taken for the villain of popular fiction. It was one of those summer evenings when there is not a breath of air in Paris. The city, hot as an oven, seemed to perspire in the suffocating night. The sewers exuded through their granite mouths tainted breath, and the underground kitchens threw on to the street from their open windows noxious vapours of dish water and stale food. The concierges in shirt sleeves smoked their pipes outside and pedestrians struggled along with depressed steps, bareheaded, hat in hand.

When Georges Duroy reached the boulevard he stopped a while undecided what to do next. His idea had been to reach the Champs Elysées and the Bois de Boulogne Avenue to obtain a little fresh air under the trees; but the desire for amorous adventure also worried him. How would the chance come along? He did not know, but he had awaited it every day and every evening for three months. Occasionally, thanks to his personable appearance and smart turn-out, he happened, here and there, on a little affair, but he was all the time on the look out for the real thing, something bigger and better. Pocket empty and blood boiling, he was inflamed by the touch of the pretty lady prowlers of the night who murmured at the street corners; "See me home, darling," but, unable to pay he did not dare to follow them; and waited another affair with other less mercenary kisses. All the same, he loved the places where the women of the town swarmed, their balls, their cafés, their particular streets; he loved to elbow them, to speak to them, to be on familiar terms with them, to smell their overpowering scents, to feel himself bodily near them. They were women, anyway, women of love. He did not despise them at all with the innate contempt of the aristocrat. He turned towards la Madeleine and followed the stream of the crowd which trickled along depressed by the heat. The great cafés full of the world, overflowing to the exits, parading their assemblage of drinkers under the sparkling light of their brilliantly illuminated fronts. Before them, on little round or square tables, glasses holding liquids, red, yellow, green, brown and all shades and

inside decanters one saw glittering large transparent cylinders of ice which cooled the bright clear water.

Duroy had slackened his pace, and desire for a drink dried up his throat. A burning thirst, the thirst of an evening in summer time gripped him, and he thought of the lovely sensation of cold drinks flowing down his throat. But, if he drank even just two bocks in the evening, good-bye to the frugal supper of to-morrow, and he knew only too well the hungry hours, of the end of the month. He said to himself: "All I have to do is to hang on for ten hours and I will have my bock à l'*Américain*. Name of a dog! How thirsty I am, all the same!" And he gazed at all those men seated and drinking, all those men who could quench their thirst as much as they liked. He strolled along, passing before the cafés with a swaggering, jovial air and estimated at a glance, from appearance, manner, attire, how much money each reveller had on him. And anger choked him against the crowd of them seated and smug there. Going through their pockets one would find gold, silver, copper. On an average each must have at least two louis, there were certainly a hundred of them in the café; a hundred times two louis would be four thousand francs. He muttered: "The swine. Everyone of them throwing his weight about." If he could have got one of them at a street corner in the dark shadow he would have wrung his neck as cheerfully as he had the peasants' chickens in the days of the Grand Manœuvres. And he recalled his two years in Africa, the way he had levied blackmail on the Arabs in those southern outposts. And a cruel and happy smile flitted across his lips as he remembered an escapade which had cost the lives of three men of the tribe of Ouled-Alane and which had been worth to him and his mess-mates twenty fowls, two sheep, gold—something to chuckle over for six months afterwards. They never found the culprits; indeed they hardly looked for them, the Arab being deemed the soldier's natural prey. In Paris it was another matter. No chance of a bit of graceful looting, sword at one's side and revolver in hand, far from civil jurisdiction, at liberty. He felt in his heart all the instincts of the freebooter let loose on a conquered countryside.

How he looked back on them now, those two years in the desert. What a fool not to have stayed there! But, there, he had hoped for better things, coming back. And now! Ah! Yes, now; well, there he was! He rolled his tongue in his mouth with a little click as if to proclaim the dryness of his throat. The throng moved around him, bored and cumbrous and he thought all the time. "Set of brutes! Every idiot there has money in his pocket." He ran up against the men and whistled bright little tunes. The gentlemen jostled, recovered themselves grumbling; their wives called him an animal. He passed before the Vaudeville and stopped in front of the Café Américain, asking himself if he must not take his bock, his thirst now actual torture. Before deciding he looked at the time on the luminous clocks in the middle of the street. It was a quarter past nine. He knew himself. The moment the glass, full of beer, was before him he would swallow it down at a gulp. Then what was he to do afterwards?

He paused: "I'll go as far as la Madeleine," he said. "and then go home."

As he arrived at the corner of the Place de l'Opéra he spied a stout young man whom he remembered vaguely having been somewhere before. He started to follow him, searching in his mind for some clue and saying *sotto voce*: "Now, where the devil have I met that fellow?" He ransacked his memory uselessly; then suddenly, by an odd freak of memory he visualized the same man, thinner, younger rigged out in Hussar's uniform. Of course, Forestier! Increasing his pace he tapped him on the shoulder. The other turned, gave him a glance and said: "What can I do for you sir?" Duroy burst into a laugh: "You don't recognize me?"

"No."

"Georges Duroy of the 6th Hussars."

Forestier gripped both his hands: "Well! Well! old chap, and how goes it with you?"

"Very well, and what about you?"

"Not too good. Fancy me with chest trouble! But I've got it. I cough six months out of the twelve. That bronchitis caused it. You remember it got me in Bougival

the year I came back to Paris. Four years of it now. Well you look solid enough anyway."

Whereupon Forestier, taking his old comrade's arm launched forth on the details of his illness, on consultations, opinions, doctors' verdicts and the difficulty of doing what they told him in his position. He was ordered to pass the winter in the South; but how could he? He was married and a journalist in a good job.

"I am in charge of the political side for *la Vie Française*. I do the Senate for the *Salute* and the literary column for the *Planet*. So you see, I've got on." Duroy looked at him. He was astonished. The man was completely changed. He was matured; he had poise, carriage, the assurance of one firmly established, and a stomach on him too, of a man who dines well. He used to be thin, weedy, irresponsible, feckless, a bit of a bully too, roystering, always in trouble. Three years in Paris had turned him into a different being, somebody stont, a bit smug and going grey at the temples though he could not be more than twenty-seven.

He asked: "Where are you off to?"

"Nowhere. I was just having a stroll before turning in. I'll tell you what. I've some proofs to run through at *la Vie Française*. Come along with me there. Then we'll have a bock together."

"I'm your man!"

And they walked off arm in arm with that easy familiarity which exists between old school fellows and between comrades in arms.

"What are you up to in Paris?" asked Forestier.

Duroy shrugged his shoulders. "I die of hunger, just that. Once my time was up I always wanted to come to Paris to...to, well to make my fortune or rather just to live in Paris; and here I am on an office job in the Northern Railway for the last six months at fifteen hundred francs a year and not a centime more!"

Forestier grunted sympathetically. "Hell," he said. "You can't get fat on that."

"You're right. But how can I pull myself out of it? I'm

on my own. I don't know a soul. I can't go about recommending myself to people. It's not the will that's lacking. It's the means."

His chum looked him up and down from head to foot in the manner of the man of common sense who knows his subject, then pronounced his verdict with entire conviction. "You see, old chap, here everything depends on assurance, poise, aplomb. A man with a little shrewdness can more easily become a Cabinet Minister than an office manager. You've got to force yourself on people, not be a supplicant. But how the devil is it you haven't found yourself a better job than the Northern?"

Duroy answered: "I have looked everywhere and found nothing. But I've something in view at this very moment. I've been offered the job of riding master in Pellerin's School. There I shall get at least three thousand francs."

Forestier stopped short. "Don't take it. Sheer stupidity. when you ought to get ten thousand francs. You destroy your whole future with one blow. In your office you are at least hidden away, a nobody, not a soul knows you. You can walk out if you've got any pluck and make your own way. But, once you are a riding master you're done for. It's just as if you were a butler in a house where all Paris dines. When you have given riding lessons to men of the world or their daughters how can they get used to looking on you as an equal?"

He became silent, thought a little, then demanded:

"Are you a graduate?"

"No. I failed twice."

"That doesn't matter; from this moment you have pursued your studies to the end. If someone talks about Cicero or the Tiber, I suppose you've got some idea of what he's saying?"

"Yes, a little perhaps."

"Good. No one knows any more, except a score or so of fools no one bothers about. It's not difficult to pass as a highbrow; the whole thing is not to be caught out in some flagrant exhibition of ignorance. One works round a thing, steps by a difficulty, goes round an obstacle, by-passes trouble.

Men, all the lot of them, are stupid as geese and ignorant as carps."

He spoke like a jovial cynic who knows life, and smiled as he looked on the passing crowd. But suddenly a fit of coughing seized him and when it was over he went on in gloomy vein. "Isn't it a bore not being able to get rid of this cough? And here we are in mid-summer. Oh! this winter I'll take the cure at Mentone. It's getting worse too. Health before everything, damn it."

They reached the boulevard Poissonnière, and a large glass doorway before which an open newspaper was spread out. Three people had stopped there reading it. Above the gate was displayed in great fiery illuminated letters *la Vie Française*. And pedestrians passing suddenly into the glare which these three flaming words threw around them appeared suddenly in full view, clear, plain, distinct as high noon, then withdrew again into the shadow.

Forestier pushed open the door. "Come in," said he. Duroy followed him, climbed a staircase, gaudy and dirty, which overlooked the whole street, passed into an ante-chamber in which two clerks greeted his comrade, then stopped in a kind of waiting hall, dusty and shaggy, hung with artificial velvet of a mouldy green, riddled, spotted and in holes as if the mice had been nibbling them.

"Sit down" said Forestier, "I'll be back in five minutes." And he disappeared through one of the three doors. A peculiar, strange, indescribable odour, the odour of editorial sanctuaries permeated the place. Duroy remained motionless, a little nervous, altogether confused. From time to time men would pass before him, running in at one door and out at the other before he could even give them a glance. Sometimes these were young men, mere youths but with keen business looks, holding in their hands sheets of paper which trembled in the breeze of their tempestuous progress; or compositors whose inkstained working blouses allowed one a glimpse of a snow white collar and shirt and neat trousers as trim as any business man's; sometimes a perfect little gentleman would enter, dressed just a trifle too elegantly,

figure squeezed in just a trifle too much at the waist of his frock coat; foot displayed in a shoe just a trifle too pointed. leg a trifle too tightly encased in its wrapping, some worldling reporter bringing in the echoes of the evening. Others arrived, solemn important fellows complete with tall hats with flat rims as if the latter set them apart from the rest of mankind.

Forestier reappeared, holding by the arm a tall thin fellow between thirty and forty, in a black coat with white tie, very swarthy, pointed moustache and a supercilious, insolent, self-satisfied manner. Forestier said to him, "Good-bye Chief," and the other giving him a handshake answered. "So long, dearie," and went down the stairs whistling, cane under arm. "Who's that?" asked Duroy.

"That's Jacques Rival, the famous columnist, the duellist. He's come to run over his proofs. Garin, Montel and he are the Big Three in the columnist world in Paris. He makes thirty thousand francs a year for two articles a week."

As they went out they ran into a fat, clumsy, long haired little man who went wheezing and panting up the steps.

Forestier greeted him with profound respect. "Norbert de Varenne, the poet, author of *Stagnant Suns*, one of the very top-notchers. Every poem he turns out brings him in three hundred francs and the longest don't run to more than a couple of hundred lines. But let's go in the Napolitain, I'm beginning to raise a thirst."

As soon as they were seated Forestier called "Two Bocks" and swallowed his own with one gulp, while Duroy drank the beer by slow draughts, sipping and savouring it, like something priceless and rare. His companion was silent, seemed thoughtful, then suddenly said: "Why don't you have a shot at journalism?" Duroy looked at him bewildered: "But . . . how can . . . I've never written a line."

"Bah! One tries, one begins. Why I myself could employ you to search out 'scoops' for me, make appointments, pay calls. You'd start at two hundred and fifty francs and your expenses. Would you like me to speak to the Director?"

"Yes, rather, I should very much."

"Then do one thing, come and dine with me to-morrow. I've only five or six guests. The governor, Mons Walter, his wife, Jacques Rival and Norbert de Varenne, the fellow you've just seen, and a friend of my wife's. Agreed?"

Duroy hesitated and reddened. He muttered at last. "I—I haven't any dinner kit."

Forestier was absolutely dumbfounded: "What?" he said "No dinner kit. Hell! It's the one solitary thing you can't do without. Get this. In Paris you can much better do without a bed than a dress suit."

Then suddenly, exploring his waist-coat pocket, he drew out some gold pieces, took two louis and placed them before his old comrade in arms very frankly and unaffectedly. "You can pay me back when you can. Hire the clothes or buy 'em on monthly terms; any way fix yourself up and dine at my place to-morrow, seven-thirty, 17, rue Fontaine."

Duroy, embarrassed, picked up the money. "It's more than good of you," he stammered, "I'm very grateful, you may be sure I'll not forget...." The other interrupted, "Right, that's good. Another bock, eh? Waiter, two bocks." Then, when they had finished he asked: "You'd like an hour's stroll?" and Duroy agreeing, they set off towards la Madeleine.

"What shall we do?" asked Forestier. "We pretend that in Paris the idler can always find something; its' not true. When I want to stroll around in the evening I never know where to go. A turn in the Bois is only fun if you have a woman with you, and a woman's not always ready at hand; the café concerts may suit my chemist and his wife but they don't suit me. Well, what else is there? Nothing. We ought to have a summer garden there, like Monceau park, open all night, where we could listen to the very best music and drink the choicest wines under the trees. It wouldn't be a pleasure resort, but a leisure resort; with a stiff entrance charge to draw the very finest women. It would need a really lovely garden and a tremendously big one. It would be delightful. Where do you want to go?"

Duroy, quite at sea, didn't know what to suggest; at length he answered. "I don't know the Folies-Bergère. I wouldn't

mind looking in there."

His companion scoffed, but agreed: "Well! Well! The Folies-Bergère! We shall be cooked to a frazzle there. Anyway it's funny there sometimes." So they turned round and made for la rue Faubourg Montmartre.

The illuminated front of the show cast a tremendous light on the four streets that converged upon it. A row of cabs were drawn up at the exit.

Forestier was going in, when Duroy stopped him. "We've forgotten to pay," and the other replied grandiloquently: "With me, no one pays."

As they drew near the ticket office the three officials there greeted him. The middle one extended his hand. The journalist demanded: "Have you a good seat?" "Yes, certainly Mons Forestier." He accepted the ticket given him, pushed open the curtained door and they found themselves in the auditorium.

A cloud of tobacco smoke, veiled the stage a little and the other side of the theatre. And rising ceaselessly in slender whitish threads from all the cigars and cigarettes which the whole male audience were smoking, this light haze climbed upwards, collected at the ceiling and formed under the huge dome around the chandelier below the gallery a gloomy sky of smoke.

In the vast entrance corridor, which leads to the promenade where prowl the bedizened tribe of girls of the town jumbled amongst the dense crowd of men, a group of women-waited new arrivals before one of three counters; where they presided, painted and jaded, three traders in wines and in love. Tall mirrors behind them reflected their backs and the faces of those passing.

Forestier made for these counters, walking importantly like a man who counts. He approached one of the women cashiers. "Box 27" he said.

"This way, monsieur." And she shut them in a tiny wooden box, open, upholstered in red, containing four chairs of the same colour so close together that it was almost impossible to make one's way between them. The two friends sat down and

on their right and left following a long line jutting upon the stage at its two ends was a collection of similar boxes, filled with men similarly seated of whom one could see only the head and chest.

On the stage three young men in tights, one tall, one middle sized and the third a little fellow were doing a trapeze act. But Duroy paid hardly any attention to the turn, and with head averted from it could not keep his eyes even for a moment from the grand Promenade behind him full of men and prostitutes.

Forestier said to him "Have a look at the Orchestra stalls. Nothing there but John Citizen with his wife and his children, worthy chuckle-headed stupid louts who come merely to see the show. In the boxes, men about town, some artists, some 'midway and between' women; and behind them the oddest collection in Paris. What are these men? Look at them closely. They are of every kind, of every profession, of every caste, but sheer vulgar vice rules. Here they are, work-a-day people, bank clerks, shop assistants, civil servants, reporters, officers in mufti and then in addition a crowd of weird male suspects who defy analysis. As for the women I've known every one of them these six years; one sees them evening after evening in the same streets all the year round, except when they're undergoing venereal treatment at St. Lazare or Lourcine."

Duroy was no longer paying attention. One of the women, leaning her elbow on their box was eyeing him. She was fat with a sallow face whitened by powder, long black eyes, heavily pencilled, framed under enormous artificial eyebrows. Her robust heavy breasts strained the dark silk of her dress; and her painted lips, crimson, like a bloody wound, gave her something bestial, scorching, repellent, but which inflamed lust none the less.

With a nod of her head she beckoned one of her friends passing, a fleshy red haired blonde and said to her in a voice loud enough for him to hear: "There's a chap who looks a sport: if he wants me for ten louis I shan't say no."

Forestier turned round and smiled, tapping Duroy on

the thigh. "That's for you my lad; you've a success. Congratulations."

The ex-Sergeant Major had reddened; and with a mechanical movement of his finger handled the two gold pieces in his vest pocket.

The curtain was lowered; the orchestra was starting a waltz.

Duroy suggested a turn in the gallery and they were immediately swept up in the current of promenaders. Pressed, jostled, squeezed, elbowed they went along, before their eyes a sea of hats. And the women in this crowd of men, two by two, were passing and crossing with the greatest ease gliding between elbows and stomachs and backs as if they were at home there, like fish in water, quite nonchalant in the midst of this torrent of males.

Duroy, fascinated, let himself be carried along, and gulped down drunkenly the foul air, tainted by tobacco, by human odour and the stale perfumes of the lights o' love.

But Forestier sweated and, gasped and coughed,

"Let's get into the garden," he said.

"What about another bock?" It was Forestier's suggestion and they sat down watching the passing show. Occasionally a prowler would accost them, asking with stereotyped smile: "Will you buy me a drink Monsieur?" and on Forestier suggesting "a glass of water at the fountain," would move off, muttering: "Then go there yourself, Pig-face."

But the plump, swarthy woman who had been leaning against their box turned up again walking arrogantly, her arm passed under that of the stout blonde. In their way they really made a fine pair of women, contrasting well.

She smiled on seeing Duroy as if their eyes had already spoken of intimate and secret things: and taking a chair she sat down composedly in front of him, and making her friend sit down too she gave her order in a clear voice. "Waiter, two grenadines." Forestier, surprised, said something and she answered: "It's your friend. He intrigues me. I really believe he could induce me to make a fool of myself."

Duroy, taken aback, couldn't find a word to say. He grinned owlishly, twirling his moustache. The waiter brought the syrups which the women drank at a draught and then got up; and the swarthy one with a friendly, little nod of her head and a light tap on the arm from her fan said to Duroy: "Thanks Lovey. You are not exactly verbose;" and they went off swaying their buttocks. Forestier began to laugh. "There you are, my lad. Do you realize you are really a success with women? That's worth developing. It might take you far. Through the ladies one can get there more quickly."

And as Duroy continued to smile without replying he asked: "Are you going to stay here? I'm going home, I've had enough of it."

"Yes, I'll stay a little. It's not late."

Forestier got up. "Right! Good-bye then. To-morrow. Don't forget. 17 rue Fontaine, seven-thirty."

"Yes, till to-morrow and thanks."

They shook hands and the journalist left.

The moment he'd gone Duroy felt free and again he gleefully jingled the two gold pieces in his pocket; then, getting up he mixed with the crowd, ransacking it with his eye. He saw them presently, the blonde and the brunette who had resumed their ceaseless promenade like haughty mendicants in a mob of men.

He went straight up to them and stuck there tongue-tied. The brunette said: "Have you found your tongue yet?"

He spluttered "Parbleu" and couldn't get out another word. Then quite suddenly she demanded: "Are you coming home with me?"

"Yes," he answered, "but I've only one louis in my pocket." She smiled indifferently: "That doesn't matter," and took his arm in token of possession. As they went out he told himself that the other twenty francs would easily procure him a dress suit for the morrow, on hire.

CHAPTER II

"WHERE is Mons Forestier's place please?"

"The third door on the left."

The concierge had answered pleasantly in a tone which seemed to indicate respect for his tenant; and Georges Duroy climbed the staircase. He was a little awkward, nervous, ill at ease. He was wearing a dress suit for the first time in his life and the general effect disturbed him. He felt something was wrong everywhere; his shoes were not patent leather, though a good enough shape, for he prided himself on good taste in footwear, the front of his shirt, which he had bought that morning at the Louvre, was too tight and already splitting. His other everyday shirts were all so worn out that he couldn't use even the least dilapidated of them. His trousers a bit too large, badly fitting at the legs seemed to roll itself round his calves and had that rumpled look which hired clothes present to the limbs they chance to cover. The coat, alone, was not too bad, being almost an exact fit.

He went slowly up the stairs, heart hammering, worried in mind, with the galling fear of looking ridiculous; and suddenly he came face to face with a magnificent gentleman in glorious apparel who was looking at him. This being was himself reflected in a tall mirror on the first floor landing. A start of pure joy shook him, he looked so incredibly better than he had imagined possible. At home he possessed only a tiny shaving glass and surveying with increasing gloom each separate part of his improvised toilet he had exaggerated its imperfections and worried himself into the idea that he looked grotesque. Actually and literally, seeing himself unexpectedly in the mirror he had not recognized himself; he had taken himself for someone else, for some society man and a pretty smart and distinguished one at that. He had a good long careful look at himself and found the result altogether satisfactory.

Then he rehearsed himself as actors do, learning their parts. He smiled at himself, held out his hand to himself, gesticulated, portrayed sentiments; astonishment, pleasure, approval; and he sought for the meaning smile, the speaking glance, to cut a figure with the ladies to make them know that Georges Duroy worshipped them and that he desired them. A door opened on the landing. He fled up the stairs with great speed, terrified by the fear of having been seen smirking in the glass by some guest of his friend's. On the second floor he came to another mirror and slowed down to watch himself pass. His appearance seemed to him the last word in style. He carried himself well, and a terrific confidence in himself suddenly filled him. Not a doubt about it, he must succeed with that figure, that desire to get there, that will to win, that independent spirit. He wanted to run, to leap the climb to the last floor. He halted before a third mirror, twisted his moustache with a characteristic movement, took off his hat to pat down his hair, and murmuring to himself, a habit of his, "Here we go," stretched out his hand to the bell and rang it.

The door opened almost at once in the presence of a butler in black livery, solemn, close shaved, of such an immaculate poise that Duroy lost his nerve again without understanding where his vague discomfort came from; an unconscious comparison perhaps between the cut of their clothes. This lackey who had on patent leather shoes, took the overcoat which Duroy was not wearing but carrying on his arm to hide its stains, asked whom he was to announce, and proclaimed the name into a room which one entered from behind a heavy curtain.

But Duroy, all his assurance suddenly gone, halted, petrified with shyness. He had to take his first step into an existence longed for, dreamed of. He managed to step toward. A fair young woman was standing quite alone waiting for him in a large room as full of fernery as a conservatory. He pulled up short totally disconcerted. Who was this lady smiling at him? Then he remembered that Forestier was married and the thought that this lovely fair-haired fashion-

able girl must be his friend's wife completed his discomfiture. He stammered "Madame, I am....," when she held out her hand.

"I know it Monsieur. Charles told me of your meeting yesterday evening and I'm very glad he thought of asking you to dine with us to-day." He blushed to his ears, not knowing what to say; and felt himself being examined from head to foot, weighed up, judged. He wanted to make excuses for himself, to invent some reason to explain the deficiencies in his dress. But he found none and dared not touch upon the awkward subject. He sat down in an arm chair she indicated and as he felt the soft springy velvet give under him and its comfortable relaxed support, it seemed to him that he entered a new and delightful life, that he took possession of something delectable, that he himself became someone, that he was saved; and he looked at Madame Forestier whose eyes had not left him for a single moment. She had on a dress of pale Kashmir blue, which suited her supple form and full figure well. Her arms and throat emerged from a cloud of white lace trimming her corsage and short sleeves; and her hair, naturally wavy with tiny curls at her neck, enveloped her head in a lovely light downy haze.

Duroy pulled himself together under her scrutiny, which recalled to him without his knowing why that of the women of the Folies-Bergère the night before.

Each of them had grey eyes, that sky-grey colour giving a remote expression, thin nose, full lips, rather fleshy chin, irregular seductive figure, graceful and provocative. Each had one of those faces every line of which reveals a special charm and of which every little movement seems to say something or hide something.

After a short silence she asked him: "Have you been in Paris long?" Little by little getting a hold on himself he answered: "Only a few months, madame. I'm working on the railway; but Forestier has given me hopes that with his help I might have a shot at journalism." She had a very open good-natured smile. "I know", she said softly.

The valet announced: "Madame de Marelle." It was a little brunette. She came in with sharp allure; she seemed like a model, moulded from head to foot in a very simple black dress. One single rose in her black hair, drew one's violent attention, like a mark of character, seeming to accentuate some special attribute to give her the live abrupt note she wanted.

A young girl in a short frock followed her. Mme Forestier darted across. "Good day, Clotilde."

"Good day, Madeleine."

They embraced. Then the girl patted herself tidy with all the assurance of the Great Lady, and Mme Forestier made the introductions.

"Mons Georges Duroy, a great friend of Charles; Mme de Marelle, my friend and kinswoman."

She added: "You know, we're here without ceremony, without affectation and without show. That's understood, isn't it?" And the young man acknowledged it with a bow.

The door opened again, and a little fat gentleman appeared, short and round, giving his arm to a distinguished looking and beautiful woman, taller and very much younger than he, with the grand manner and a sombre charm. It was M Walter, Deputy, financier, man of money and business, Jew and Southerner, director of *la Vie Française* and his wife, formerly Basile-Ravalau, daughter of the banker of that name.

Then entered, side by side—Jacques Rival, very elegant, and Norbert de Varenne, his dress collar a little soiled by the friction of his long hair which tumbled almost to his shoulders. His tie, clumsily twisted on didn't seem to be on its first outing. He came forward with the grace of an old dandy and taking Mme Forestier's hand, planted a kiss upon her wrist; and in the kissing movement his long hair spread out like a shower of water over the young woman's bare arm. Then Forestier came in with excuses for being late. He had been detained by *l'affaire* Morel. M Morel the radical Deputy was going to question the Minister upon the credit vote for the Algerian colonization scheme.

Duroy found himself seated between Mme de Marelle

and her daughter. He felt awkward again, being afraid of making some mistake in the management of his knife or fork or glasses. He had four of the latter, one tinted a light blue. What was he to drink in that?

No one spoke a word during the soup course. Then Norbert de Varenne asked: "Have you read the Gauthier case? What a comic business!"

And they debated this case of Adultery-cum-Blackmail; not at all as one speaks in the bosom of one's family of events recounted in the daily press, but as one discusses a disease amongst medical men or vegetables amongst green-grocers. Not one was indignant, not one amazed by the facts. They sought out the inner secret causes with professional curiosity and with absolute indifference to the crime itself. They set out on a frank explanation of the reasons for the actions, to settle all the scientific phenomena out of which the drama was born, the pathological result of a particular state of mind. The women also threw themselves into this exercise, this task. And other events in the news were examined, commented on, turned inside out and upside down, estimated at their precise value with that practised glance, that peculiar specialized insight of the hawk of news, the retailers of the human comedy by the line, just as in the tradesman's world they examine, turn over and price the goods they're going to sell to the public.

Then there was the matter of a duel and Jacques Rival took the stage. That was his province; no one else could deal with it.

Duroy dared not put in a word. All the time he was looking at his neighbour whose rounded shoulders fascinated him. Her diamond earring with its golden thread glistened like a sparkling drop of water. Occasionally she threw in a witty comment which always evoked a smile from everyone. She possessed a sardonic, pleasing unstudied wit, and the mind of an experienced tomboy who surveys things and sums them up with a sort of careless, light genial cynicism.

It was a good dinner and everyone enjoyed it. M Walter eating like an ogre hardly spoke, and with eyes greedily

glistening under his spectacles pondered over every course. Norbert de Varenne kept silence and spattered his shirt front with sauce and gravy.

Forestier, smiling and serious, superintended, exchanging understanding glances with his wife, like a couple of business partners conscientiously carrying through a difficult deal.

Faces reddened and voices thickened; and all the time the waiter whispered his hint: "Corton. . . Chateau Laroze?"

Duroy discovered he liked Corton and let his glass be filled again and again. A most delightful cheerfulness took possession of him; a warm expansive gaiety which climbed up from stomach to head, ran through every limb, permeated his whole being. He wanted to speak, to deliver an oration, to be listened to, to be appreciated like those men whose lightest word is hung upon with rapture.

But the chatter went on ceaselessly, jumping from one idea to another, leaping at a chance word from subject to subject, skirting every single event of the day and skimming the surface of a thousand topics.

M Walter between the courses made a joke or two, for he was not without a certain coarse, sarcastic humour. Forestier retailed his article of the morrow. Jacques Rival advocated a military government, with grants of land to all officers after thirty years' service.

"In this way," said he "you will create a live community, which by its long experience will have learnt to know the country and love it, and be conversant with all those grave local customs which newcomers invariably come to grief over."

Norbert de Varenne interrupted him.

"Yes . . . they'll know everything except agriculture. They'll speak Arabic but they won't know how to transplant a beet-root or sow corn. They will be very strong in fencing but precious feeble in manure. What is wanted is to open this new country to everyone. Men with brains will make a place for themselves there. The others will go under. It's the social law."

Georges Duroy to his own astonishment then opened his

mouth and held forth. He was surprised by the sound of his own voice, as if he had never heard himself speak before.

"What is lacking there most is good soil. The really fertile parts cost as much as in France and are brought up as investments by wealthy Parisians. The real colonists, the poor, who bury themselves there for lack of bread are chucked into the desert, where they can't get on for lack of water."

Everyone started at him. He knew he was blushing. Mons Walter asked him: "You know Algiers, Monsieur?"

He replied, "Yes, Monsieur, I was there twenty-eight months and stayed in all three provinces."

And bluntly ignoring the Morel matter Norbert de Varenne questioned him about a point of custom that he had obtained from an officer. It concerned Mzab, that strange little Arab republic right in the middle of the Sahara in the most arid part of that burning desert. Duroy had twice visited Mzab and he told of the customs of this singular country where drops of water have the value of gold. He spoke with a certain boastful racy warmth and vigour stimulated by the wine and the wish to please; and he managed in vivid colourful words to bring before them those gaunt yellow regions for ever desolate under the sun's devouring flame. All the women had their eyes fixed on him. Mme Walter murmured in her slow drawl: "You could make a most charming series of articles out of those recollections." Then Walter peered at the young man from above the rim of his glasses and had a good look at him. Duroy looked down at the dishes. Forestier seized the opportunity: "My dear Director, I have so often spoken to you of Georges Duroy and asked you to let him assist me on the political information side. Since Marambot left us I've had no one to do urgent and confidential assignments and the paper's losing by it." Daddy Walter became serious and suddenly raised his glasses to look Duroy full in the face. Then he said: "Mr. Duroy's got an original mind, that's certain. If he'd care to come and have a chat with me tomorrow at three o'clock we will fix it up." Then, after a pause and turning towards the young man, he added: "But do, right away, a short witty series on Algeria. You can

tell your reminiscences and bring in the colonization question at the same time. What we want is realism, make it realistic all the time and I'm certain it will go down well with our readers. But hurry up. To draw the public we must have the first article to-morrow or the day after while they are actually discussing the scheme in the Chamber."

Mme Walter added with that grave charm which she put into everything and which gave to every syllable the semblance of a favour conferred. "And you have a delightful title, haven't you? *Souvenirs d'un Chasseur d'Afrique*, Don't you think so, Monsieur de Norbert?"

But the old poet, who had attained fame late in life and who detested and despised newcomers replied dryly. "Yes, excellent, provided the result has style, for that's the main difficulty; the exact note, what musicians call tone."

Mme Forestier gave Duroy a protective smiling look, that of an expert and it seemed to say: "you've arrived." Mme de Marelle turned to him the diamond in her ear trembling ceaselessly as if the tiny globule of water was about to detach itself and fall.

The little girl remained quiet and serious, her head bent over her plate.

The servant was going round the table, pouring Johannesburg wine into the blue glasses; and Forestier proposed a toast coupling Mons Walter's name with it: "To the continued prosperity of *la Vie Française*!!

Everyone turned towards the Director who was smiling, and Duroy, pale with triumph drank his at a draught. He would similarly have drunk a whole barrel, devoured a bull, strangled a lion, as it seemed to him then. He felt in his limbs superhuman vigour, in his mind unconquerable resolve and infinite hope. He was in his element now amongst these people; he was about to take up his position there, to win his place. He surveyed the faces round him with a new assurance; ...and he dared for the first time to address a word to his neighbour.

"Madame, that is the loveliest pair of earrings I've ever seen." She turned to him, smiling: "It's my own idea to

hang the diamonds like that, simply by a thread. It reminds one of the dew, doesn't it?"

He murmured, confused by his audacity and afraid of committing a *bêtise*: "It is charming....but it is the ear that makes the gem worth while."

She rewarded him with a look, one of those straight clear looks penetrating to the heart which some women can give.

And, as he turned his head he met the eyes of Mme Forestier, quite friendly, but he thought he saw in them a lively amusement, bright malice, encouragement. The men were all talking at the same time now, with gestures and raised voices. They were discussing the great scheme for a Metropolitan railway. The subject only talked itself out at the end of dessert, everyone of them having something to contribute about the slowness of communications in Paris, the inconvenience of trams, the boredom of buses and the impudence of cab drivers. Then they left the dining room for coffee. Duroy, jokingly, offered his arm to the little girl. She thanked him solemnly and hoisted herself on tiptoe to place her hand within his arm.

Entering the drawing room, again one had the feeling of going into a greenhouse. Great palms opened their stately leaves in every corner of the room, climbing almost to the ceiling. The air was fresh, and permeated with a vague delicate perfume, indefinable and to which one could not give a name.

And the young man, more master of himself now, examined the room attentively. There was nothing grand about it; nothing particularly striking except the ferns; but one felt at one's ease in it, one was quiet, rested; it softly surrounded one, it pleased one, seemed to touch one's body with something like a caress.

"Will you have coffee, Monsieur Duroy?"

And Mme Forestier handed him a cup with that friendly smile which never left her lips. He received his cup and as he bent to pick up with the silver tongs a lump of sugar the young woman whispered to him. "Pay your court to Mme Walter;" and she was gone before he could say a word.

He drank his coffee straight off because he was afraid of dropping it on the carpet; then, more at ease, he sought a means of approaching the wife of his new employer and engaging her in conversation. Suddenly he noticed she was holding an empty cup; and, being some way from a table didn't know where to put it. He darted forward.

"Allow me, Madame."

"Thank you, Monsieur."

He took the cup away and returned: "If you only knew, Madame, what happy moments *la Vie Française* has given me when I was there, in the desert. It is really the only paper one can read away from France because it is so much more literary, so much more enlightened, so much less boring than the others. One finds everything in it." She smiled with serene indifference and answered seriously.

"M Walter has had a good deal of trouble creating this type of journal which supplies a real need."

They started to chat. He had an easy, if banal, fluency, a very attractive voice and a certain charm of look and carriage. They spoke of Paris, its neighbourhood, the banks of the Seine, watering places, the pleasures of summer, all the commonplaces on which one can chatter interminably without fatigue.

Then, as Norbert de Varenne approached, a liqueur glass in his hand, Duroy discreetly withdrew.

Mme de Marelle, talking to Mme Forestier called him: "Well, Monsieur," she said bluntly, "so you want to dabble in journalism."

He spoke of his plans in vague terms and went through again, with her, the whole conversation that he had just had with Mme Walter; but, as he had mastered his subject better by now, he put on an improved show, largely by repeating as his own, the things that he had been told a few moments before. And all the time, he looked into her eyes, as if to give a deeper meaning to what he said.

She, on her side, told him anecdotes, with an easy warmth, that of a woman who knows herself to be witty and intends always to be funny, and, becoming familiar she put her hand

on his arm, lowered her voice to say things giving an appearance of intimacy. It thrilled him immensely to flirt with this young woman. Suddenly he wished he could devote himself to her, defend her, show her what he was worth; and the looks that he threw into his replies to her indicated what his thoughts were.

But, quite abruptly, without any reason, Mme de Marelle called: "Laurine" and the little girl came across to her.

"Sit down here, dear, you'll be cold near the window."

And Duroy was taken with a ridiculous impulse to embrace the child as if something of the kiss might pass on to the mother.

He asked in a courtly, paternal tone: "Will you permit me to embrace you, Mademoiselle?"

The child raised her eyes to his with a look of surprise.

Mme de Marelle, much amused said: "Answer him.... You can kiss her to-day Monsieur; but you won't always be allowed to."

Duroy sat down and took Laurine on his knee, lightly kissing the child's lips and lovely wavy hair.

The mother was astounded: "Look, she's not running away. It's amazing. She never lets anyone kiss her but women. You are irresistible, Monsieur Duroy."

He blushed without reply, and lightly rocked the little girl on his knee. Mme Forestier came up with a startled exclamation, "Well, well, Laurine tamed, what a miracle!" and Jacques Rival arriving, cigar in mouth, Duroy got up to leave, afraid of spoiling by some clumsy utterance, the work of conquest he had begun. A soft, meaning pressure on the little hands of the women and a firm grip on the men's marked his departure. He noticed that Jacques Rival's hand was dry and warm, firmly and cordially, responding to his own clasp; Norbert de Varenne's, damp and cold perspiring through the fingers; Daddy Walter's limp, flabby, expressionless; Forestier's fleshy, tepid. Lowering his voice his friend reminded him.

"Don't forget, to-morrow 3 o'clock."

"No, not likely."

Outside, triumph surged through him; he could have flown down the stairs and did leap down them two at a time : suddenly seeing in one of the mirrors a frantic gentleman, frisking and gambolling to meet him, he pulled up short, ashamed as if he had been surprised in some crime.

Then he took a long look at himself, amazed that this really personable fellow was himself; and with a smile a trifle smug and with that low ceremonious bow which one reserves for the great ones of the earth he bade farewell to his own image.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Georges Duroy found himself in the street again he hesitated what to do. What he would have preferred would have been to drift along breathing in the soft night air, musing and dreaming of his future, but the thought of the series of articles required by Daddy Walter, held him and he made up his mind to go home at once and start work.

He went back at a smart pace, reached the outer Boulevard and followed it to la rue Boursalt where he lived. The six-storied house was crammed with twenty common little working class families, and climbing the stairs littered with spent matches, dirty foot prints, bits of paper, cigarette ends and food droppings he was seized with sickening distaste and a frantic desire to get away from it all, and to live like the wealthy people he had left in a decent home in decent surroundings. A filthy smell of decayed food, of water closets, of the tumble down old building which no fresh current of air could drive away, filled the place from top to bottom.

The young man's room looked, as upon some vast abyss, over the immense Great Western Railway lines just outside the tunnel by Batignolles station. Duroy opened the window and leaned out.

Below him, at the tunnel's gloomy mouth, three motionless red signal lights looked like the huge eyes of some beast, and farther and farther on he saw more and more of them. Every moment screaming whistles, long or short, hissed through the night air, some quite near, others barely audible from the *d'Asnières* side. One of them drew near now, wailing its mournful whine, increasing second by second and then with thunderous roar a great yellow light. Duroy watched the long chain of wagons engulf itself in the tunnel.

"Now to work," he said and placed his lamp on the table; but the moment he had settled down to write, found that he possessed nothing but a packet of note paper.

It would have to do. He would use that to open his masterpiece in all its grandeur. He dipped his pen in the ink and in his very best script, wrote at the top.

RECOLLECTIONS OF A CHASSEUR D'AFRIQUE

Then began the search for the opening phrase.

He sat, head on hand, eyes fixed upon the white paper spread out in front of him.

What was he to say? He couldn't recall a thing now of all his reminiscences of a short while ago. not an anecdote, not a word, nothing. Suddenly he thought "I must start with my departure," and wrote down: "It was in...., round about the 15th May when prostrate exhausted France rested after the disasters of that ghastly year...."

He stopped short not knowing how to lead up to what followed, his embarkation, the voyage, his first emotions.

After ten minutes' reflection to put off to the morrow the introductory opening and start now on a pen picture of Algiers.

And on the paper he wrote: "Algiers is a completely white city...." without being able to describe another thing. In memory he saw again the lovely shining city, falling, like a cascade of flat houses, from her mountain into the sea but could find not one solitary word to express what he had seen and felt.

After a gigantic effort he added: "It is partly inhabited by Arabs" and then, putting his pen on the table, he rose.

In his little iron bed, in the hollow made by his body, he saw his everyday clothes where he had thrown them, shabby, worn, limp, pitiful like the livery of the dead house; and upon a wicker chair, his silk hat, his wonderful silk hat, open as if to receive alms. The walls were covered with grey wall paper with blue posies and as many stains as flowers, ancient unidentifiable stains, squashed bugs, drops of oil, greasy finger marks, slops splashed from the wash-hand basin. And hatred of his poverty-stricken life rose within him again. He must get out of it, he must finish with this brutish existence from to-morrow. The impulse to work suddenly gripped him again and down he sat before his

table, seeking phrases to portray the strange delightful charm of Algiers, antechamber to vast, mysterious Africa, Africa of nomad Arabs and unknown tribes, Africa unexplored, inviting, of impossible legendary beasts, of ostriches, huge birds, gazelles, unbelievable grotesque giraffes, solemn camels, the monstrous hippopotamus, shapeless rhinoceros and man's terrifying brother the gorilla.

Thoughts of this kind came to him vaguely; perhaps he could have spoken them but not one word could he formulate in writing. And his impotence frenzied him; he stood up, hands damp with sweat and brain hammering. His eyes fell on his laundry bill, left there in the evening by the concierge. Instantly he was plunged into abandonment of despair. Happiness, self-confidence, hope for the future disappeared in a second. It was the end; everything was finished, he would never do anything, be anything; he felt himself incompetent, washed up, useless, damned.

He leaned out of the window again at the precise moment when a train emerged with startling unexpected roar from the tunnel; it was going across fields and plains to the sea. And the memory of his parents entered Duroy's heart. It was going near them, this train, within a mile or so of their house. He saw it again, the tiny house at the top of the cliff, looking down on Rouen and the vast valley of the Seine.

His father and mother kept a little tavern, a small roadside inn to which suburban worthies resorted on Sundays for lunch. They had wanted to make a gentleman of their son and sent him to college, which he left without a degree and joined the army. He was to be an officer—Captain, Colonel, General. But disgusted with military life, after completing his five years he had dreamed of making his fortune in Paris. And to Paris he had come the moment he was demobilized, regardless of the entreaties of the two old people, who, disillusioned, with their dream shattered, still wanted him with them. He banked his hopes on the future. Confused and muddled, yet he foresaw glorious triumph ahead. He was positive about it; saw it being born, rising. In the regiment he had achieved promotion, success and even

conquests in higher spheres; there was the Income-tax man's daughter he had seduced who wanted to leave everything to follow him; the barrister's wife who had tried to drown herself when he had thrown her over. A card, a rake, a strategist who could extricate himself from any scrape. That was what his comrades said of him; and that, he told himself was what he would be, a card, a rake, a strategist. His native Norman wit, fed on the daily trickery of garrison life, African lootings, illicit affairs, cheating exploits, and also the soldier's peculiar code of honour, military swagger, patriotic sentiments, real enough these in their way, bragging yarns of the warrant officers' mess and the variety peculiar to his profession, had become a sort of bottomless box in which he could find an answer to every emergency.

But ambition to succeed governed him in everything.

Without knowing it he had fallen into a reverie, his habit every evening. He conjured up a glorious amorous adventure which at one stroke would lead him to the realisation of all his hopes. Some banker's daughter or a great nobleman's, picked up in the street, conquered at sight, married to him.

He was startled out of his dream by the strident whistle of an engine dashing out of the tunnel alone, like a huge rabbit from its warren, making for the marshalling yard. Seized again by this vague joyous hope, he threw a care-free kiss into the night, a kiss of love to the dream woman, of desire for the coming fortune. Then he shut the window and began to undress muttering to himself: "In the morning I'll make a better job of it. I'm not in the right mood to-night. Besides, perhaps I've had a drop too much. One can't work in that state." He got into bed, blew out his light and was asleep in a second.

He woke early, as one does in days of great hope or great anxiety, and jumping out of bed, to swallow, as he put it, a glass of good fresh air. Then he remembered he must get to work at once, and sent off the concierge's daughter with a ten-sou tip to his office to say that he was ill. He sat down before his table, propped his chin in his hand and sought for ideas. In vain. Not a single one came.

But he was not downhearted. "Bah!" he thought. "I'm not used to it. It's the knack of it one wants. I shall have to get help, the first time. I'll look up Forestier. He'll put me on the track in ten minutes." He dressed himself.

In the street he reflected that his friend would be sleeping late and it was much too early to show up at his house; so he dawdled slowly under the trees of the outer Boulevard.

It was not yet nine when he reached Monceau park, fragrant, fresh, just watered. Sitting down on one of the benches he fell dreaming again. A young man was patrolling up and down before him, very smart and stylish, doubtless waiting for a woman. She turned up, veiled, walking quickly, and after a hurried handshake, took his arm. They went off together. Tumultuous desire gripped Duroy; a need for loves, aristocratic loves, perfumed, fastidious. He got up and started off, thinking of Forestier's. Had he any chance in that direction? He reached his door just as his friend was going out.

"You here. At this hour! What's up!"

Duroy, embarrassed at meeting him just as he was leaving, was at a loss.

"It's....It's....I can't get started on my article,—you know, that Algiers article for Mons Walter. It's not surprising really, seeing that I've never written anything before. One wants practice, in this as in everything else. I'm sure I shall do it quickly enough, but with this first attempt, I don't know how to set about it. I've plenty of ideas. I'm full of them, but I can't put them into words."

He stopped, hesitating. Forestier smiled with a sort of good humoured malice.

"I know that."

"Well I came...I came to ask you to lend me a hand...In ten minutes you can put me on my feet if you'll just show me the trick of it. Just give me one good lesson in style and then I can manage without you."

The other man, greatly amused, was still smiling. He tapped his old friend on the arm.

"Go up and see my wife. She'll look after you as well as I could. I'm fixed up with work. I've no time at all this morning, otherwise I'd willingly do it for you."

Duroy hesitated, suddenly nervous.

"But at this hour I can't present myself to her."

"Yes, you can. She's up. You'll find her in my study putting some notes in order for me."

Duroy refused to go up.

"No....It's out of the question."

Forestier took him by the shoulders, pivoted him on his heels and pushed him towards the staircase. "Be off, you ass, and do as I tell you. You don't expect me to clamber up three stories to present you and explain your case, do you?"

Duroy decided to do it. "Thanks I'll go. But I shall tell her you compelled me, absolutely forced me to come and find her."

"Yes. Don't worry, she won't eat you. And don't forget, three o'clock."

"Oh! not likely."

And Forestier went off, with his hurried air, while Duroy went up, slowly stair by stair, wondering what he was to say and uneasy about the welcome he would receive.

A servant opened the door to him, blue-aproned and a broom in her hand.

"Monsieur is out," she said not waiting to be questioned.

"Ask Mme Forestier if she'll see me. Tell her I've come from her husband whom I've just met in the street."

He waited. The woman returned, opened a door on the right and announced him.

She was seated on an office chair in a little room, its walls completely hidden by books well arranged on wooden shelves. The multicoloured bindings, red, yellow, green, violet, blue gave a touch of colour and warmth to the monotonous regularity of the books; she gave him her hand, showing a bare arm in its wide open sleeve. She had her invariable smile.

"So early?" she said; then added: "Not a snub, a simple

question." He mumbled: "Oh Madame, I didn't want to come up. But I met your husband downstairs and he forced me to. I'm so nervous I hardly dare tell you what I came about."

She pointed to a chair: "Sit down and tell me."

She was nimbly twisting a quill pen between two fingers; and a page of foolscap, partly written on showed the young man what he had interrupted.

She seemed as much at home before this office table as in her drawing room, like one engaged in everyday work. A delicate scent was wafted from her peignoir trimmed with white lace, the fragrant perfume of one fresh from the bath; speculating on what the soft filmy material concealed he imagined he saw her young body, bright, plump, warm.

As he said no more, she resumed: "Well, tell me what it is."

He mumbled something, tongue-tied. Then: "The fact isbut really....I can't tell you....I was working last night very late....and this morning....very early... on that Algiers article for M Walter....and I can't do a thing....I've torn up all my attempts....I haven't the knack of this sort of thing; and I came to ask Forestier to give a hand....just for once."

She interrupted him by a sudden burst of laughter, rich laughter right from the heart, happy, joyous, exuberant flattered laughter. "And he told you to look me out? How nice of him."

"Yes, Madame. He told me that you could put me right better than he could....But I didn't dare, I didn't have the pluck. I'm sure you understand." She rose. "It's going to be quite charming to work together. I'm delighted with the idea. Now, sit down in my place because the journal knows my writing; and we're going to turn out an article, yes, a success, an article worth while."

He sat down, took a pen, spread open a sheet of paper and waited. Mme Forestier leaned back, watching him make these preparations; then she took a cigarette from the

mantelshef and lighted it.

"I can't work without smoking. Now, let's see. What is your story?"

He looked at her, astonished.

"But...I don't know...That's what I've come to you to find out."

She replied : " Yes, I'll put in shape. I'll make the sauce but you must supply me with the plate."

He hesitated, embarrassed. "I want to describe my voyage from the very beginning."

She sat down facing him, on the other side of the table, looking him straight in the eyes.

"Very well. First tell me about it, for my ear alone, you understand, just tell it simply in your own way, forgetting nothing and I'll decide what to use."

But as he had no idea where to begin she began to question him as a priest in the confessional would have done, searching questions which brought back to him forgotten details, personages, meetings, events. When this cross-examination had lasted about a quarter of an hour she suddenly stopped him.

"Now we're going to start. We will assume you are writing your impressions to a friend, a method which enables you to let loose a lot of intimate footing, to make uncensored comments, to be natural as well as witty."

"My dear Harry, you want to know what Algiers is like and you shall. Having nothing to do in this dry little mud hut which is my dwelling, I'm going to send you a sort of journal of my life, day by day, hour by hour. If it turns out a bit on the lively side sometimes, no matter, you are not obliged to show it to your lady friends...."

She stopped to relight her cigarette and at once the little grinding squeak of the quill pen on the paper ceased too.

"Carry on," she said.

"Algeria is that great French domain on the frontiers of the vast unknown country called the Desert, the Sahara. Central Africa...."

"Algiers, glistening white is the port, the shining charming port of this strange continent.

"But first one has to get there and it's no picnic. You remember Major Simbretas, we used to call Dr. Calomel. When we considered ourselves due for twenty-four hours' sick leave, blessed word, we used to look him up. You remember his prescription: 'This soldier is suffering from stomach disorder. Administer Vomitive No. 5 according to my Formula; then twenty-four hours' leave. He will do well.'

"Well, old chap, to get to Africa I had to undergo for some forty hours another sort of irresistible Vomitive according to the Formula of the Compagnie Transatlantique."

She got up and walked about, after lighting another cigarette and dictated, blowing out straight waves of smoke rings, scattering them with her open hand or a sharp move of her finger, then watching the broken fragments fade away with grave scrutiny: and Duroy, eyes raised, would watch every action, every unstudied pose, every movement of her supple body and of her face busied in this vague game with her thoughts elsewhere.

Then she pictured the vicissitudes of the voyage, portrayed travelling companions of her own invention, and launched out on a love affair with the wife of an infantry captain going out to join her husband.

Seated again she cross-examined Duroy about the topography of Algiers. She was absolutely ignorant about it but in ten minutes knew as much as he did, and fitted in a neat little section on political and colonial geography to prepare the reader's understanding for the more serious questions to be raised in subsequent articles.

Then she set out on an excursion into the province of Oran, a fantastic imaginary trip all about women, Moorish women, Jewesses, Spanish ladies. "Sex is what gets them always," she observed.

She finished with a stay at Saida at the foot of the high plateaus and a lively little intrigue between Warrant Officer Georges Duroy and a Spanish work-girl employed in the Alfa grass factory at Ain-el-Hadjar. She held forth on the meeting, the appointment, the night together on the bare rocky mountain, the jackals, hyenas and pariah dogs, scream-

ing, laughing and barking amongst the crags.

Then she proclaimed happily: "The rest to-morrow!" And rising: "That's how you write an article, my dear sir. Sign please."

He hesitated: "Sign?" Then he laughed and wrote at the bottom of the page: "GEORGES DUROY."

She went on smoking and walking about; and he couldn't take his eyes off her, filled with gratitude and sensual well-being at this budding intimacy. It seemed to him that everything about her was part of her, everything, even the book covered walls. The furniture, the household goods, the tobacco laden air, all had something intimate, harmonious, graceful seductive coming from her.

Suddenly and peremptorily she demanded:

"What do you think of my friend Mme de Marelle?"

He was surprised: "Well....I think....I think she's quite fascinating."

"Yes, isn't she?"

"Very!" He would have liked to add: "But not so much as you are." He didn't dare.

She resumed: "And if you know how witty she is, so original and intelligent. She's a Bohemian really, a true Bohemian. That's why her husband cares so little for her. He sees only her faults and doesn't appreciate her good points."

Duroy was astounded to hear that Mme de Marelle had a husband, natural as it was that she should.

"Good Lord...is she married? What does her husband do?"

Mme Forestier raised her shoulders and eyebrows in a mysterious significant movement. "Oh! He's an inspector on the Northern Railway. He spends only eight days of the month in Paris. His wife calls it 'Compulsory service' or 'One week's duty', or 'Holy week.' When you know her better you will see what a dear she is. Go and see her one day."

Duroy had no thought of leaving now; it seemed to him that he could remain for ever, that this was his home.

But the door opened noiselessly and a very magnificent personage came in unannounced.

He pulled up on seeing another man. Mme Forestier seemed embarrassed just for a second; then she said, naturally enough but blushing a little: "Come in, dear. Let me introduce one of Charles' great friends. M. Georges Duroy, a journalist to be."

Then in a different tone: "Our best and most intimate friend the Count de Vaudrec."

The two men shook hands, each raking the other with his eyes, and Duroy left at once. They didn't press him to stay. He stammered some words of thanks, touched the slender hand the young woman extended, bowed to the newcomer with his cold impassive man of the world expression, as awkwardly and clumsily as if he had just made a complete fool of himself.

In the street again, he felt worried, ill at ease, with a queer sense of frustration. He went along trying to account for this unexpected depression. There was no reason for it; but, ceaselessly before his eyes was the composed figure of the Count de Vaudrec, ageing a little, grey at the temples, with his air of cool insolence,—the very rich man completely sure of himself. And he noticed that the arrival of this unknown breaking up a delightful *tête-à-tête* had produced that cold dismal thwarted feeling which a word overheard, an unexpected snub, the most trifling setback often do produce. Moreover, it seemed to him, without knowing why it should be so, that this man had been by no means pleased at finding him there.

He had nothing to do till three o'clock; and it was not yet noon. He had six francs odd in his pocket, so he lunched at Duval's, had a stroll on the boulevard and punctually as the clock struck three climbed the stairs of *la Vie Française*.

Errand boys waited for jobs sitting cross-armed on a form, while behind a sort of professorial desk a clerk sorted correspondence just arrived. The setting was perfect, designed to impress visitors. Everything had just the right touch of poise, allure, dignity, style exactly suitable to the antechamber of a great newspaper.

Duroy said sharply: "M Walter please."

The clerk replied: "The Director is in conference. Sit down a little, Monsieur," and ushered him to the waiting room already full up. All sorts and conditions were there. Men of note, solemn beribboned, important, and slovenly shirtless individuals, coats buttoned up to the neck with stains on them like the tracings of continents and seas on geographical maps. Three women crowded in with the men. One of them pretty, smiling, well turned out, a *cocotte* by the look of her; her neighbour a tragic mask, wrinkled, severely dressed with the worn out artificial look of the old actress, a sort of false raddled youth, like scent turned rancid.

A third woman in mourning with the sad desolate appeal of the widow was in a corner. Duroy thought she looked as if she had come to ask for alms. But they got no attention and more than twenty minutes passed. Then Duroy had an idea and sought out the clerk: "M Walter gave me an appointment for three o'clock," said he "and, anyway, see if my friend M Forestier is here." They directed him down a long corridor leading to a large hall where several gentlemen were writing at a big beige covered table.

Forestier was standing before the fire-place, smoking a cigarette and playing bilboquet¹. He was extraordinarily skilful at this game and at every shot coaxed the huge ball into the tiny yellow box. He was counting: "Twenty-two... Twenty-three... Twenty-four... Twenty-five..."

Duroy added "Twenty-six," and his friend raised his eyes without stopping the regular movement of his arm.

"Oh there you are! Yesterday I scored fifty-seven straight off. Saint Potin's the only one that can give me a game. Have you seen the boss? There is nothing so comic as to watch that old buffoon de Norbert play bilboquet. He opens his mouth as if he's going to swallow the ball."

One of the subs turned round to him.

"I say, Forestier, I know of one for sale, a real beauty, in sandal-wood. They say it belonged to the Queen of Spain. It's going for sixty francs; that's not dear." Forestier demanded: "Where is it?" And, as he broke down at his

1. Cup and ball.

thirty-seventh shot, he opened a cupboard in which Duroy saw a score of bilboquets or more numbered and meticulously arranged like a collection of jewels. Then, having placed his instrument in its appointed place, he repeated: "Where is it, this masterpiece?"

The journalist answered: "At a stationer's shop by the Vaudeville. I'll bring it in to-morrow morning if you like."

"Right, do. If it's really a good one I'll take it; one can't have too many bilboquets." Then turning to Duroy: "Come on. I'll take you in to the Boss. If I didn't you'd be hanging about here till seven this evening."

They crossed the waiting room. The same people waited in the same order. The moment Forestier appeared the young woman and the old actress got up and came to him.

He took them, one after the other to the recess by the window and though they were careful to lower their voices Duroy noticed that they "thee'd and thou'd" one another.

Then, pushing the padded doors open they were in the Director's sanctum. The "Conference" which had lasted an hour was a game of écarté with some of the gentry whom Duroy had met the evening before.

M Walter held and played his hand with crafty caution while his opponents laid theirs down, picked them up and held them with the supple skill of experienced players. Norbert de Varenne was writing an article in the editorial chair and Jacques Rival, eyes closed and stretched at full length on a couch was smoking a cigar.

The place gave one that shut-in feeling; the leather of the furniture, the stale tobacco, the smell of printing; that peculiar odour, the speciality of newspapers known to every journalist.

Forestier shook hands with those gambling on the different players and without a word watched the game. The moment Daddy Walter had won he intervened.

"Here is my friend Duroy."

The director sharply considered the young man, his eyes very bright behind his glasses. Then he demanded, "Have you brought my article? It'll fit in very well to-morrow, at

the same time as the Morel debate."

Duroy took the foolscap paper from his pocket.

"Here it is, sir."

M. Walter was delighted. "Excellent, Excellent. You're a man of your word. Do I have to revise this, Forestier?"

Forestier answered quickly.

"There's no need at all, M. Walter. I went over it with him to give him the right approach. It's quite good."

And the Director who was being asked to deal the cards by an important, if insignificant-looking little man, a Deputy of the Left Centre, added indifferently: "That's all right then." But Forestier didn't allow him to begin the fresh game, and whispered in his ear: "You know you promised me to engage Duroy in Marambot's place. Do you want me to settle with him on the same terms?"

"Yes, the same." And taking his friend's arm the journalist led him away what time M. Walter settled himself down again to his game.

Norbert de Varenne had not raised his head. He seemed neither to have seen nor recognized Duroy. Jacques Rival, on the other hand, had shaken hands with him, with a demonstrative energy and friendly goodwill that made one sure of him in case of need.

They traversed the waiting room again and as everyone looked at them expectantly Forestier said to the youngest of the women, loudly enough to be heard by all those patiently waiting: "The Director will see you presently. He is in conference, just now, with two members of the Budget Commission." Then he hurried off, very important and harassed as one immediately about to draft a despatch of gravest import.

Back in the sub-editor's room Forestier at once resumed his bilboquet, concentrating on it and counting his score as he spoke to Duroy. "Now listen. You will come here daily at three o'clock. I shall tell you your duties and give you your assignments, for the day may be, or the evening or the morning. One, I shall first give you a letter of introduction to the office superintendent at the Prefecture of Police,—two, who will

put you in touch with all his subordinates. And you will fix it with him to get every scrap of important news—three, from the Prefecture itself and from official and demi-official circulars d'you understand? In matters of detail you will consult Saint Potin who is well up in it—four, you'll save to get used to pumping the guts out of anyone I send you to—five, and to gate crash everywhere, barred gates notwithstanding—six, and you'll touch for that two hundred francs a month fixed plus two sous a line for everything worth while of your own—seven, plus another two sous a line for articles, you're commissioned to write—eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen.” He broke down at fourteen: “Good God, thirteen again. It always beats me. I shall die on the 13th for certain.”

One of the subs who had finished his copy took his own bilboquet out of the cupboard, a tiny little fellow of thirty-five who looked like a child; other knights of the pen came in and one after the other each sought out his own toy. Soon there were six of them side by side, backs to the wall, bouncing with solemn regular movement their red yellow or black balls in the air. And the two sub-editors still at work got up to act as judges.

Forestier won by eleven points and the little fellow, like a small boy, rang a bell and ordered “nine beers” and while they waited for their liquor they set to at the contest again.

Duroy drank a glass of beer with his new colleagues and then asked his friend.

“What am I to do now?”

“I have nothing for you to day. You can clear off, if you like.”

“And...our...our article...will it be passed this evening?”

“Yes, but don't you bother about that: I'll correct the proofs. Do the next one for to-morrow and come here at three o'clock the same as to-day.”

And Duroy, after shaking everyone's hand without the least idea of it's owner's name, went down the staircase light hearted and carefree.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGES DUROY slept badly, tremendously excited by the prospect of seeing his article in print. At dawn he was up and about, and he was striding down the street well before the hour when the newspaper vans would deliver their wares from kiosk to kiosk.

Then he reached Saint-Lazare station well aware that the *Vie Française* would be on sale there before it reached his own neighbourhood.

He saw the newsagent arrive, saw him open his glass shop and then a man with a huge pile of papers on his head. He hurled himself at him. There were the *Figaro*, *Gil-Blas*, the *Gaulois*, the *Événement* and two or three other morning papers; but of *la Vie Française* not a single one.

Fear gripped him. "They might have put off 'Reminiscences of a Chasseur d'Afrique' till to-morrow or Daddy Walter might even have turned it down altogether at the last moment."

Going over to the kiosk again he saw the paper was on sale now. He darted forward, snatched one up, threw down three sous and ran through the titles on the first page. Not a word. His heart beat like a hammer. He turned the sheet; with a tremendous thrill he read at the foot of a column in big print "Georges Duroy". It was in! What a moment!

He strode out, hat on one side, the paper in his hand. He wanted to accost everyone, to proclaim aloud, "Buy it—buy it. An article by me is in it." He would have liked to shout at the top of his voice like the evening news boys "*Vie Française, Vie Française. Article by Georges Duroy. Vie Française. Reminiscences of a Chasseur d'Afrique.*" And suddenly he wanted to read the article himself, to read it in public, in a café, in full view of everyone. He wanted one where he was well known, and after a longish walk installed himself in a sort of wine shop. Several customers were already inside and

regardless of the early hour he called for a rum, then: "Waiter give me the *Vie Française*."

A white aproned waiter came running.

"We haven't got it Monsieur. We take only the *Rappel*, the *Siècle*, the *Lanterne* and the *Petit Parisien*."

Furiously indignant Duroy shouted: "Then get one, block-head. Go and buy me one." The waiter ran out and brought it, and Duroy started to read his article, several times declaiming loudly: "Excellent, very good, splendid" to attract his neighbours' attention and make them curious to know what was this remarkable contribution. At length he got up to leave. The landlord saw him and called him back. "You're forgetting your paper sir." Duroy replied: "I'm leaving it. I've read it. There's a first rate article in it to-day," and with much satisfaction saw one of the customers pick it up from the table.

He thought: "What to do now?" and decided to go to his office, draw his month's pay and sack himself. He felt a thrill of pleasure as he thought of the impression he would make on his chief and his colleagues, especially his chief's bewilderment. He walked slowly so as not to arrive before nine-thirty as the cashier's office didn't open till ten.

His office was a large, gloomy forbidding place, gaslit in the winter throughout the day. There were eight clerks in it and a managing clerk hidden behind a partition.

Duroy first claimed his hundred and eight francs twenty-five centimes in its yellow envelope deposited in the pay clerk's drawer. Then with conquering air he sallied into the vast work room where he had passed so many hours. As he entered the head clerk summoned him: "Ah! so it's you M Duroy. The chief's been asking for you several times. You know he doesn't allow two days' sick leave without a medical certificate."

Duroy, holding himself bolt upright for his great effect, replied in stentorian tones:

"I'm a bit fed up with the little squirt."

A movement of complete stupefaction and the frightened head of M Potel appeared peering over the partition which shut him up like a box.

He was rheumatic and barricaded himself in there for fear of draughts, having pierced three little peepholes through which he surveyed his staff.

One could have heard a pin drop. Then the dumbfounded head clerk demanded feebly: "What did you say?"

"I said I was a bit fed up with the little squirt. I've only turned up to-day to tell him I'm sacking myself. I've got the job of sub-editor on the *Vie Française* at five hundred a month plus commission. I've started this morning."

He had promised himself to prolong his pleasure but hadn't been able to resist blurting it out at one blow.

The effect was magical. There was not a movement from a soul. Then Duroy declared: "I'll just tackle Perthuis, then I'll come and say good-bye." And he marched into the chief who, on seeing him, said sharply: "Ah! there you are. You know I don't allow...." The employee pulled him up short.

"Stop bellowing like that."

M. Perthuis, a fat man and red as a turkey cock, sat suffocated with amazement.

Duroy went on: "I've had about enough of your shop. I've started this morning in the journalistic line and in a very fine post. Good-bye."

And he walked out. He was avenged.

He shook hands with his former colleagues. They had heard the conversation with the chief through the half open door and hardly dared speak to him for fear of compromising themselves.

In the street again, with his pay in his pocket, he stood himself a tasty lunch at a good restaurant he knew with moderate tariff; then after buying another *Vie Française* and leaving it behind on the writing table, he went into several shops buying little odds and ends, anything to make them send at home for him, to be able to give his name—"Georges Duroy" and add: "I am the sub-editor of the *Vie Française*."

He still had plenty of time and entered a printer's shop. The printer was turning out visiting cards on the spot under the eyes of passers-by; and Duroy immediately ordered a hundred with his new status under his name.

Then he made for the office.

Forestier greeted him condescendingly as one does an inferior. "Ah! there you are, —good. I've several jobs for you. Wait ten minutes for me. I must finish this," and he went on with a letter he was writing.

At the other end of the large table, a pale bloated little man, very fat with a shining bald head was writing, his nose nearly touching the paper through extreme shortsightedness.

Forestier looked up: "Now then Saint-Potin, what time are you going to interview our people?"

"At four."

"Well, take young Duroy here with you and show him the ropes."

"Very good."

Then, turning towards his friend, Forestier added:

"Have you brought the second part on Algeria? The first one was quite a success this morning."

Duroy faltered out: "No....I really haven't had time this morning....I've had such a lot of things to do....I couldn't manage it...." The other lifted his shoulders, with a dissatisfied air. "If you are not more up to the mark than that you'll spoil your future, you know. Daddy Walter was counting on your copy. I was going to tell him it would be ready for to-morrow. If you think you'll be paid for doing nothing you're making a mistake."

Then, after a pause, he added: "You must strike while the iron's hot, damn it."

Saint-Potin rose: "I'm ready," said he.

Forestier pivoted round on his chair, assumed an almost pontifical manner to give his instructions and turning to Duroy, said: "Listen. For the last two days we've had in Paris the Chinese General Li-Theng-Fo, staying at the Continental, and the Maharajah Tippoo Sahib at the Bristol. You're going to interview them. Ask the General and the Maharajah for their views on the intrigues of England in the Far East and India and on her domination; get their hopes on European and especially French intervention in their troubles."

He subsided, then added like an actor to the wings: "It will be of great interest for our readers to know at the same time what they think in China and India about those questions which so strongly agitate public opinion here at this juncture."

Then for Duroy's benefit: "Study Saint-Potin's methods. He's a first rate reporter. Get to learn from him how to empty a man inside five minutes." He started to write again, aloof, with the clear intention of putting his old comrade and new colleague in his place and emphasizing the distance between them.

Outside the door Saint-Potin chuckled and said to Duroy: "There, you have a go-getter. He even puts over his act on us. One would think he took us for his readers."

In the Boulevard the reporter suggested a drink, and Duroy agreeing, they went into the café and ordered two, iced. Saint-Potin became expansive. He talked of everything and of the paper with a wealth of surprising detail. "The boss? A typical Jew. And the Jews, you know, never change. What a race!" And he cited astonishing traits of avarice, of that avarice peculiar to the children of Israel, two-penny economies, cookshop bargainings, shameful discounts claimed and obtained, all the tricks of the moneylender and the pawnbroker.

"And with it all mind you, our little Jew-boy believes in nothing and sails with the wind. His paper is Tory and liberal, Catholic and secular, republican and royalist,—everything. It was founded to support his operations on the 'change and his thousand and one financial enterprises. On these it is indeed consistent, and he makes millions by companies which haven't four sous capital."

Then he held forth on Mme Walter and fine feathers making a fine bird, of Norbert de Varenne an old has-been, of Rival a reincarnation of D'Artagnan. He came to Forestier.

"As for him he simply had the luck to marry his wife and that's that." Duroy asked: "What do you make of his wife?"

Saint-Potin flourished his hands: "Oh! a rake—an upper class courtesan. She's the mistress of Vaudrec, the Count de

Vaudrec, who dowried her and married her off."

Duroy felt a sharp cold sensation, a kind of nervous shrivelling, a desire to hurt and slap this prattler's face. But he interrupted him only to ask simply: "Is your name really Saint-Potin?"

The other replied candidly: "No. My name is Thomas. It's the paper that's christened me Saint-Potin."

And Duroy, after paying his compliments, said "But it's getting on and we've two noble potentates to call on."

Saint-Potin roared with laughter: "Good Lord what a child you are! Do you think I'm going to ask this Chinese and this Indian what they think of England? Don't I know better than they do what they've got to think for the readers of the *Vie Française*? Haven't I already interviewed five hundred Chinese, Persians, Hindus, Chileans, Japanese and others? They all give exactly the same views—my views. I've only to fish out my last article on the previous latest arrival and their face, their name, their titles, their age and their retinue. One must be accurate about that, otherwise I'll have the *Figaro* or the *Gaulois* pulling me up. But on that subject the concierge at the Bristol and the Continental will put me wise in five minutes. We'll smoke a cigar and walk it.

"That means a hundred sous cab hire charged to the paper. There you are, my dear fellow, that's how the old hand does the job."

"It must pay well to be a reporter in conditions...like that."

The journalist answered with some mystic words: "Yes, it does; but nothing pays so well as the 'echoes,' the disguised advertisements." They rose and strolled along the boulevard towards la Madeleine. And Saint-Potin suddenly remarked:

"You know, if you've anything else on hand, I don't need you really." Duroy shook hands and departed.

The article he had to turn out in the evening fidgeted him and he started thinking it out. Walking along he stored up reflections, ideas, opinions and anecdotes as he climbed the Champs-Élysées, where there was hardly a pedestrian to be seen. Paris had been emptied by the heat.

After dining at a wine shop near the Arc de Triomphe he strolled slowly home on foot and sat down at his desk to work.

But the instant his eyes fell on the wide sheet of blank paper, all the material that he had collected vanished from his mind, as if his brains had evaporated. He tried to reassemble the scraps of reminiscences and fix them; as he caught up with them, they escaped him or rather they hurled themselves at him pell-mell and he didn't know how to show them, to dress them up, nor which one to begin with.

After an hour's efforts and five pages of paper blackened by introductory phrases with nothing to follow them he told himself: "I haven't got into the way of it yet. I shall have to take another lesson." And all at once the prospect of another morning's work with Mme Forestier, the hope of another long *tête-à-tête*, intimate, friendly, inviting, filled him with lust. He went to bed at once, almost afraid of trying to write again and succeeding at the first attempt.

He rose, only a little late in the morning, putting off and relishing in advance the delight of the visit.

It was past ten when he rang his friend's bell.

He was kept waiting five minutes and then ushered into the study where he had passed such a delightful morning. Forestier was now in the chair he had occupied and was writing in his dressing gown and slippers, while his wife in the same white peignoir, was dictating, her elbow on the mantelpiece and a cigarette in her mouth.

Duroy stopped on the threshold and murmured: "I'm so sorry, I'm interrupting you."

And his friend turning his head, an angry head, grumbled: "What d'you want now? hurry up. We're busy."

The other broke in flustered: "It's nothing, thanks. I'm sorry."

Forestier became more exasperated: "Good God! Don't waste time. You haven't pushed your way in for the pleasure of saying good-morning, have you?" Duroy thoroughly embarrassed now, tried to pull himself together; "No.... well....you see....I haven't begun my article yet and you were....you both were....so....so....kind last time....I

was hoping....I ventured to hope....”

Forester cut him short:

“You’re at the top of the world, my world. So you think I am going to do your job for you and all you have to do is to call on the cashier at the end of the month. Not too bad. I must say.”

The young woman went on smoking, not saying a word, smiling that vague inscrutable smile, like a pleasant mask to conceal reflections full of sarcastic irony.

Reddening with humiliation Duroy stammered: “Forgive me....I thought....I had believed....” Then he drew himself up. He spoke clearly, vigorously roughly even. “I most sincerely apologise, Madame, and once more let me thank you very gratefully for the charming instalment you did for me yesterday.” He told Charles curtly that he would be at the office at three and left. “I’ll do the job myself,” he muttered striding home at a tremendous pace. “I’ll show them.”

Seething with anger he started to write the moment he got home. He carried off with the adventure begun by Mme. Forestier piling in fictitious details, astonishing escapades and flowery descriptions; a combination of the clumsy pedantry of the collegian and the slang of the barrack room. In an hour he had put together a confused rambling medley of silly follies and bore it off with the utmost confidence to *Le Vie Française*.

The first person he ran into was Saint-Potin who shook his hand with the familiarity of an accomplice: “You’ve read my interviews with the Chinese and the Mahrajah. Pretty good, isn’t it? It’s amused all Paris. And I never set eyes on either of them.”

Duroy who hadn’t read a word of it, glanced over a long article headed *India and China* while the reporter indicated and underlined the most salient parts of it.

Forestier came in, puffing, hurried, business-like.

“Ah! Good, I want you two.”

And he gave them a number of political assignments for the evening.

Duroy gave him his article.

"Here's the second part of 'Algeria'."

"Right, I'll give it to the chief."

That was all.

Saint-Potin drew his new colleague aside into the corridor.

"Have you visited the cash section?"

"No. Why?"

"Why! To draw some pay. You see, one should always draw a month in advance. One never knows what's going to happen."

"But....I never stipulated for it."

"I'll introduce you to the cashier. He won't make any trouble. They pay well, here."

And Duroy drew two hundred francs, plus twenty-eight francs for his first article which with what was left of his pay from the railway, put him three hundred francs in pocket. He had never had so much money and felt himself a rich man.

Then Saint-Potin took him round four or five rival offices for a chat in each, hoping that the copy which he had been commissioned to collect had already been secured by the others and relying on his gift of skilled and guileless pumping to get it out of them.

In the evening, Duroy with time on his hands decided on another visit to the Folies-Bergère, and telling himself that audacity paid, presented himself at the box-office.

"My name is Georges Duroy, sub-editor of the *Vie Française*. I came the other day with M Forestier who promised to arrange about my pass. I don't know if he's done it yet?"

They looked up a register. His name was not there. However, the head clerk, a very affable fellow, let him in and told him to put in his application to the manager who would issue him a pass at once.

He went in and almost immediately ran into Rachael, the woman he had gone with the first evening.

She came up to him. "Hallo dearie. How are you?"

"Very well, and you?"

"Not too bad. You won't believe it, but I've dreamed of you twice since the other day."

Duroy smiled, flattered. "Really? And what does that prove?"

"It proves that I like you, you rascal, and that we'll do it again if you say the word."

"To-day if you like."

"Right, but listen...." he hesitated, doubtful how to put it.... "this time I've no money; I've just left a crowd where I've thrown away the lot."

She looked at him closely, detecting the lie in a second with the skilled instinct of a girl well used to the tricks and haggings of men. She said: "Liar! That sort of thing doesn't go down with me you know. It's not playing fair."

He gave an embarrassed smile: "You can have ten francs. It's all I've got left."

She veered round with the indifference of a prostitute indulging her own whim:

"All right, anything to please you, dearie. I only want you."

And, raising a seductive pair of eyes to his, she took the young man's arm, pressing herself against him amorously: "We'll have a grenadine first; and then we'll have a look round. I'd like to go to the opera with you, to show you off there. Afterwards we'll go home early, won't we?"

He slept late with the girl. It was day when he left and his first thought was to buy the *Vie Francaise*. He opened it with feverish haste. His article was not in it; and he halted on the pavement, running his eye over the printed columns again in the hope that he would still find it there.

Immediately he was plunged in gloom; after the fatigue of a night of love the disappointment fell on him with the weight of a disaster.

He went home and went to sleep, fully dressed.

Some hours later he sought out M Walter in the editorial sanctum.

"I was very surprised this morning, sir, not to find my second Algerian article in the paper."

The director looked up and said coldly: "I gave it to your friend Forestier and asked him to read it. He didn't think it good enough; you'll have to do it again."

Duroy was furious. He went out without a word and noisily marched into his old comrade's room.

"What d'you mean by stopping my article this morning?"

The journalist, buried in his arm chair, was smoking a cigarette, his feet on the table, rumpling with his heels an article just begun. He spoke with easy composure in a bored aloof tone. "The chief considered it bad work and told me to give it back to you to begin it all over again. And wait. Here it is." And he languidly indicated the sheets with his finger, lying under a paper-weight.

Duroy was stupefied. He couldn't find a word to say, and as he put his copy in his pocket Forestier went on: "To-day your first job is with the Police Commissioner...." and detailed a list of assignments. Duroy left unable to find the biting, sarcastic, witty retort he sought for.

He brought his article back the next day. It was returned to him again. Having refurbished it a third time and seeing it again turned down he realized that he was running before he could walk and that Forestier alone could help him along that particular road.

He referred no more to the 'Reminiscences of a Chasseur d'Afrique,' making up his mind to be as wily and resourceful as he could, and, while waiting all the time for something better, to show himself keen on his job as a reporter. He got to know the wings of theatres, the haunts of politicians, the corridors and vestibules of statesmen and the Chamber, the Deputies, the Under-Secretaries, the scowling faces of surly understrappers and how to wheedle and get round them all.

He obtained permanent contacts with ministers, concierges, generals, police agents, princes, pimps, prostitutes, ambassadors, bishops, perverts, crooks, jail birds, business magnates, cabmen, waiters and innumerable others; he became the genial tolerant acquaintance of the whole collection, blending them all

together in his mind, weighing them all in the same scales, sizing them up with the same eye, the result of seeing them every day and every hour and talking to them all in the way of his business. He likened himself to one who has to taste one after the other every brand of wine and can no longer distinguish between Chateau-Margaux and wine-shop trash.

In a very short while he became a remarkable reporter, sure of his information, astute, quick, subtle, really valuable to the paper, as Daddy Walter himself admitted, and he knew a good journalist.

All the same as he drew only ten centimes a line plus his two hundred francs fixed salary and as the life of the boulevard, the café and the restaurant was expensive, he was always broke and miserable.

"It's a dodge I've got to find out," he thought when he saw certain of his colleagues rolling in money, without having the least clue as to the secret methods by which they procured this luxury; and he speculated enviously on anonymous and dubious operations, on secret services rendered, on illicit gain tendered and accepted. Well, he would solve this mystery, join this silent partnership, force himself on its members and they would have to admit him into it.

And often, in the evening, looking out of his window at the passing trains, he pondered on the means he would employ.

CHAPTER V

Two months sped by : it was September and Duroy's longed for rapid fortune seemed a long time coming. What galled him was the humdrum dead level of mediocrity of his life and his complete inability to see his way towards scaling the heights and exacting deference and money. He felt himself shut in by the dull routine of a reporter, enclosed by walls from which there was no exit. His work was appreciated but no one accorded him his real status. Forestier even, to whom he was of the greatest value, never now-a-days asked him to dinner and treated him as a complete inferior, though he still kept up the "thee and thou" of friends.

Occasionally, it was true, Duroy would manage to place some trifling article, having acquired by experience a superficial competence and style which had been lacking when he had written his second Algerian article. But as for turning out anything spontaneous or original of his own or treating political subjects authoritatively and judicially, there was all the difference between driving along the avenues of the Bois as coachman and as master. What humiliated him more than anything was to have the doors of society closed to him, not to be on equal terms with anyone of culture, to lack the friendship of women of any standing, except a fairly well known actress or two who entertained him occasionally from motives of self-interest. Besides, he knew and had proved that he possessed for women of all kinds a peculiar fascination, an instant appeal and he fretted all the more on this account, at not knowing women who could influence his future, with all the impatience of a hobbled horse.

Many a time he had thought of paying a call on Mme Forestier but the humiliation of their last meeting stopped him as well as the probability that she would be engaged, with her husband. Then he remembered Mme de Mareille and her invitation to visit her, so, having nothing to do one afternoon

he presented himself at her house. He rang her bell at two-fifteen. She lived in de Verneuil avenue. At the sound of the bell a nurse-maid opened the door, a slovenly little woman with untidy hair, tying her cap on as she spoke, "Yes, Madame was in, but she didn't know whether she was up yet."

Duroy went in. The room was fair sized, with a neglected look about it and scantily furnished. Six shabby old chairs were ranged along the walls, a servant's alignment, for there was nothing here of the fastidious care of a woman who takes a pride in her home. Four tawdry pictures portraying a skiff on a river, a ship at sea, a sheep in a field and a wood-cutter in a forest, hung, all four of them crookedly from unequal cords. Obviously they had hung there slanting for a long time under a careless indifferent eye.

Duroy sat down and waited. He waited a long time. Then a door opened and Mme de Marelle came in, running. She had on a Japanese rose silk dressing gown embellished with golden landscapes, blue flowers and white birds:

"You won't believe it, I was still in bed. How nice of you to come and see me. I quite thought you'd forgotten me."

She held out both hands with a delighted gesture, and Duroy, whom the shabby room had put at his ease, kissed one as he had seen Norbert de Varenne do.

She sat him down and surveyed him from head to foot.

"How you've changed! You've got poise now. Paris has done you good. Now, tell me all the news." And he chattered away at once with the curious feeling that an intimate friendship had been born in a moment, that one of those currents of trust, familiarity and affection had been formed which sometimes bring about immediate understanding between two people of the same character and race.

Suddenly the young woman broke in with an interruption that astonished him. "I've a strange feeling with you. I seem to have known you ten years. I think we're going to be great chums. Would you like to be?"

He replied, "certainly,"—with a smile which implied that he would like a good deal more.

He found her very tempting in her bright soft dressing

gown, less refined than the other in her white peignoir, less fastidious, not so dainty but spicier, more exciting.

Nearness to Mme Forestier with her gracious enigmatic smile which beckoned him on and halted him at the same time, which seemed to say "you please me" and "take care" made him want to lie at her feet, to kiss the thin lace so delicately covering her breast, to inhale slowly the lovely warm perfume of her. With Mme de Marelle the desire was more brutal, more animal, more distinct, making his hands tremble before the curves of her body revealed by the thin silk.

She chattered away, every sentence sparkling with that sprightly quick wit of which she was mistress. He listened thinking: "She's worth keeping in with. One could make a Parisian diary out of it, a gossip feature on the day's events."

There was a soft knock at the door by which she had come in and the little girl appeared. She walked straight across to Duroy and held out her hand to him.

The astonished mother murmured: "It's an absolute conquest. I never would have believed it." The young man kissed the child and sat her beside him, pleasantly but with the utmost gravity questioning her about what she had been doing since they had last met. She answered in her tiny flute-like voice with solemn grown-up seriousness.

The clock struck three. The journalist rose to leave.

"Come often," Mme de Marelle invited, "we can have other talks. I shall always enjoy your coming. But why haven't I seen you at the Forestiers'?"

"Oh! no reason really. I've had so much to do. I hope we shall meet again there one of these days."

And he left, his heart full of hope without knowing why. He didn't mention this visit to Forestier.

But he kept the memory of it in the days following; more than the memory, a kind of sensation of the unreal yet persistent presence of this woman. It was as if he had taken away some part of her, her bodily image remained before his eyes and her spiritual being in his heart. He lived under the thrall of it, as we do sometimes after passing hours of delight with another. He was, so to say, possessed in a way which was strange, inti-

mate, confused, disturbing and yet exquisite because it was so full of mystery.

In a few days he paid a second call.

The nurse-maid ushered him in and Laurine appeared at once. This time she didn't offer her hand but her face and said: "Mamma told me to ask you to wait. She will be a quarter of an hour. In the meantime I shall try to entertain you."

Duroy, much amused by the ceremonial manners of the child, replied with mock gravity: "Excellent, mademoiselle, I shall be most happy to pass a quarter of an hour with you. But I warn you I am not in a serious mood. It is my habit to play games every day. I propose now to play the game of 'chase the cat'."

The little oddity hesitated, puzzled, then she smiled with the condescension of a grown up woman, a little shocked and surprised also; she murmured: "The rooms are not made to play in."

He answered: "Very likely: but I play everywhere. Now catch me." And he ran round the table, inciting her to chase him, while she followed behind, smiling all the time with a kind of polite tolerance, now and again holding her hand out to touch him but never lowering herself to the extent of running.

He stopped, bent down, when she came on with her little faltering steps, he leaped in the air like a jack-in-the-box and launched himself with one bound to the other end of the room. This amused her, she broke into a laugh, became excited and began to trot along behind him, uttering pretty, happy half fearful little cries when she thought she had caught him. He moved the chairs about, placed obstacles, made her run round one of them after him and then leaving that, jumped behind another. Laurine, a rosy maid now, and running with might and main was a picture of happiness, throwing herself into this new game with all the glow of a delighted child, enchanted with everyone of her companion's flights, leaps and tricks. Suddenly just as she thought she had caught him he took her in his arms and lifting her nearly to the

ceiling said. "Cat perched."

The child wriggling her little limbs to escape, laughed joyously.

Mme de Marelle entered. She was completely amazed: "Laurine....Laurine, you, playing!....You really are a sorcerer, monsieur."

He put her down, kissed her mother's hand and they sat her between them. They wanted to talk; but Laurine, so mute as a rule, was thoroughly wound up now and babbled away without stopping. In the end they had to send her from the room.

She obeyed without demur but with tears in her eyes.

As soon as they were alone Mme de Marelle lowered her voice.

"D'you know I've been thinking of you and I've got a great idea. This is it. As I dine every week at the Forestiers', I return it occasionally in a restaurant. You see, I don't entertain at all at home. I've no arrangements for it and besides I've nothing in the house, no kitchen, not a thing. I like to live like a Bohemian. So I dine them from time to time in a restaurant, but it's not too cheerful, just three of us, and my acquaintances hardly know them. I'm telling you this to explain an invitation which is a bit irregular; I want you to join us next Sunday at the café Riche at half past seven. You know the place?"

He accepted eagerly. She went on: "We shall be just the four of us; a little party on our own. These little outings are quite an event for women like me who are not used to them."

She was wearing a dark maroon dress which moulded her figure, her thighs, her throat and arms in a way which was daringly provocative; and Duroy felt a perplexed astonishment, a constraint almost at the obvious contrast between this ordered graceful elegance and the careless indifference to the lodgement which housed it.

Everything which clothed her body, everything which touched her flesh intimately and directly, was delicately fastidious but what surrounded her mattered nothing at all.

He left her feeling, just as he had before, a sort of mental hallucination, that strange feeling of her continued presence. He looked forward to the day of the dinner with ever-growing impatience.

He still couldn't afford to buy a dress suit and had to hire one again. He was the first to arrive at the restaurant, some minutes before time.

He was shown to the second storey to a little red decorated dining room with its one window looking out on the boulevard.

On a square table with four covers was spread a white table cloth so shining that it might have been polished; and the glasses, silver and cutlery glittered gaily under the flames of a dozen candles in two high candelabra. Outside all was subdued green from the trees softly illuminated by the lights from the private rooms.

Forestier came in and shook hands with a cordial friendliness that he never displayed in the *Vie Française* Office.

"The two ladies will arrive together," he said. "They're very nice, these little dinners." Then he looked at the table, extinguished one of the gas jets, shut one side of the window on account of the draught and carefully chose the most sheltered place for himself declaring: "I've got to be very careful. I've been better for a month but for the past day or two I've not been too fit. I must have caught cold Tuesday coming out of the theatre."

The door opened and the two young women appeared, followed by the manager. They were veiled, remote, discreet with that charming mysterious allure they assume in these places of suspect neighbours and meetings.

As Duroy greeted Mme Forestier she complained of his not having been to see her; then with a smile towards her friend she added: "The fact is you prefer Mme de Marelle. you find plenty of time for her."

They sat down and the manager handed Forestier the wine lists. Mme de Marelle cried: "Give the gentlemen whatever they like. We will have the best iced champagne—a sweet champagne of course—nothing else." And when the

man had left she said with an excited laugh: "I'm going to spread myself out to-night. We're going to have fun this evening and make a real night of it."

Forestier who appeared not to have heard said: "Does anyone mind if I close the window? My chest has been bothering me for some days."

No one minded and he went and closed the remaining half of the window, returning to his seat more cheerful and brightened up.

His wife said nothing. She seemed thoughtful. Her eyes were lowered towards the table; while she smiled at the glasses, that vague graceful smile which was always making a promise that she would never fulfil. Ostend oysters were brought, delicate, fleshy like little ears shut in their shells, resting between the palate and the tongue like salted sweetmeats. Then, after the soup, a trout, pink as a young girl's flesh, and the guests began to chat.

First they discussed a scandal which was going its rounds. It was the story of a lady of rank surprised in a private room with a foreign prince by a friend of her husband.

Forestier was much amused by this adventure and laughed loudly. Both the women proclaimed that the careless babbler was a blackguard and a coward. Duroy took their view and hotly asserted that in affairs of this kind a man had a duty to support, one simple imperative duty, and that was to preserve the silence of the grave. He added "How full life would be of delightful incidents if each one of us could count on the absolute discretion of the other. What often stops women, nearly always stops them in fact, is the fear of trust betrayed, the secret being given away. Come now," he said smiling, "own up, isn't this true? Aren't there many who would surrender to sudden passion, to the quick violent impulse of an hour, to a whim, a caprice of desire, if they weren't so terrified of paying for a short while of light-hearted bliss by some irreparable scandal and bitter tears."

He spoke with a conviction that was contagious, like one pleading a cause, his own cause, like one saying: "I'm not

that sort. No risk of such dangers from me. Try me and see."

Both ladies gave him a searching look, an approving look, a look which said he spoke the truth, admitting, both of them, by their silence that their own inflexible Parisian morals would have very quickly succumbed before the certainty of secrecy.

And Forestier stretched almost at full length on a sofa, one leg tucked underneath him suddenly declared with the laugh of the convinced sceptic. "Hell! Yes. We husbands should have to pay for it, if our wives could be sure of silence. Poor husbands what?"

They began to talk of love. Without admitting it to be eternal Duroy claimed that it should be lasting, creating a bond, tender friendship, trust. The union of senses was only a seal on the union of hearts. But he waxed scornful about the jealousies, the vituperation, the melodramas, the scenes which nearly always accompanied ruptures.

He felt silent and Mme de Marelle sighed: "Yes it's the one solitary good thing in life and we so often ruin it by our wretched unreasonableness."

Mme Forestier, toying with her knife, whispered: "Yes yes....it's good to be loved."

And she seemed to push her dream farther off to ponder on things she dared not say.

While they waited for the entrée, they sipped the champagne, and nibbled the crusts pulled from tiny round loaves. And the thought of love, slow encroaching, took possession of them, exciting them little by little just as draught after draught of the clear wine warmed their blood and unsteadied their thoughts.

Lamb cutlets arrived, tender and light on their rich bed of asparagus. "What a treat!" said Forestier, eating slowly and savouring the fresh viand and oily vegetable like cream.

Duroy answered: "When I love a woman, the whole world disappears around her."

He spoke with conviction, elated at the thought of the

gratification of love's fulfilment amid the material gratification he was now tasting. Mme Forestier murmured with her air of being untouchable. "There is no blessing that can be compared with that first pressure of the hand, when the one says, 'Do you love me?' and the other answers, 'Yes, I love you.' " Mme de Marelle who had just emptied at a draught another glass of champagne, said saucily: "For my part, I am not so platonic." And each of the men, his eye kindling, chuckled approval of the jest. Forestier sprawling on the couch, arms outstretched on the cushions said: "Your candour does you credit and shows that you're a practical woman. But might one ask what is your husband's opinion?"

She shrugged her shoulders lightly, with measureless scorn, then said frankly: "M de Marelle has no opinion. He has only...only abstentions." And the conversation descended from lofty theories on love to the realms of bawdy stories.

It was not the moment for the skilful hint, masks lifted like skirts, by a subtle word, the moment for tricks of suggestion, daring insolence open or disguised, impudent avowals, the covered phrase which strips naked, subtly revealing what one dare not say and allows to men practised in it, a sort of subtle mysterious gratification, a kind of impure contact of thought by bringing into the open things secret, shameful, lustful, hidden.

They were eating now without tasting anything, mechanically concerned solely with what they said, plunged into a bath of desire. Both women contributed their share to all this, Mme de Marelle with a natural provocative assurance, Mme Forestier with a charming reserve, a touch of shyness, in her tone, her voice and her smile and with it all an allure which while seeming to diminish really emphasized the extreme audacity of her words.

Forestier lying back on his cushions, laughed, drank and ate all the time every now and again throwing in a remark so broad or so utterly crude that the ladies a little taken aback by the form and only for form's sake put on an expression of reproof lasting a second or two.

After perpetrating some particularly outrageous vulgarity

he would add : " It's all right, children. If you go on as you're going, you'll end up by saying exactly the same sort of thing."

Dessert came, and coffee; then liqueurs, inflaming their minds with heavy close heat.

Fulfilling her earlier announcement Mme de Marelle by now had thrown off all restraint and she acknowledged it with the merry sparkling gaiety of a woman exaggerating to amuse her guests' intoxication which was real and obvious enough.

Mme Forestier fell silent, prudently perhaps; and Duroy feeling the effects of the wine and that he might make a fool of himself, kept himself well in hand.

They were lighting their cigarettes when Forestier suddenly began coughing.

It was a terrible attack, which tore his throat, as with face purple and covered with sweat he choked into his handkerchief.

When it was over he grumbled bitterly : " They're no good to me, these parties. It's madness," All his good humour had vanished in the haunting terror of his malady.

" Come out, let's get home," he said.

Mme de Marelle rang the bell, asked for the bill. It was brought almost at once. She tried to read it but the figures danced before her eyes and she passed it to Duroy. " You pay it for me. I'm too tight to see," and she gave him her purse.

The bill came to a hundred and thirty francs. Duroy checked it, paid with two notes, took the change and whispered to her : " How much shall I tip the waiter ?"

" What you like. I don't know."

He put five francs in the plate, handed the young woman her change and said to her : " May I see you home?"

" You'll have to. I shouldn't be able to find my own address."

He shook hands with the Forestiers and found himself alone with her in a cab. He felt her against him, her nearness, shut in with him in that black box lighted momentarily by the

beams of the street lamps. He felt the heat of her body against him, and he could find nothing to say, absolutely nothing, his mind gripped in overwhelming desire to take her in his arms.

"If I risked it, what would she do?" he thought; and the recollection of all the hints and innuendoes during dinner emboldened him while the fear of scandal held him back.

She gave him no clue, silent, motionless, sunk back in her corner. He would have thought her asleep, had he not seen her eyes shirring every time a beam of light entered the carriage.

"What was she thinking?" He knew that he must not speak, that a single word, breaking the spell, would ruin his chances; but audacity failed him, the audacity of quick brutal action.

He felt his foot touched. She had made a movement, quick, nervous, one of appeal, perhaps. The gesture, scarcely perceptible, made him tremble from head to foot. He turned sharply, seized her in his arms, sought her mouth with his lips, her bare flesh with his hands.

She uttered a cry, a plaintive little protest, trying to stand up, to push him away, to repulse him, then surrendered as if she no longer had the strength to resist.

But the carriage was pulling up at her door now, and Duroy had no need to seek for compassioned words, to thank her and express his grateful love. She made no attempt to alight, lying back exhausted, inert, passive at what she had allowed; and he, with his mind on the cabman's suspicions got out first to give her his hand and help her out. She got down at length stumbling, not speaking a word. He knocked, and as the door opened asked nervously: "When shall I see you again?"

She answered so softly that he hardly heard her: "Come to lunch to-morrow" and disappeared in the shadow of the vestibule.

He gave the coachman a hundred sous and set off at a quick triumphant pace, his heart bursting with happiness.

He had done it! A married woman! A lady! A real lady! A real lady of Paris! And how easy, how unexpected it had

been. Till that moment he had always thought that to subdue and conquer one of these delectable creatures, infinite pains were needed, endless attempts, a skilled siege, methods of gallantry, words of love, whispers, gifts. And now, at a touch, at the least attack, the first little advance he made she surrendered to him wholly, so quickly that he was bewildered.

"She was drunk," he told himself; "to-morrow it'll be a different tale; tears, reproaches." The idea disturbed him. "It won't make any difference. Now I've got her I'll know how to keep her." And in a confused mirage out of which emerged his ambitions, hopes of grandeur, success, renown, wealth and love he saw garlanded figures, a procession of women, dainty, rich, influential, passing before him smiling and disappearing one after the other on the golden horizon of his dreams. His sleep too, was peopled with visions.

He felt a little awkward the next morning climbing her staircase. How was she going to receive him? What if she didn't receive him at all? If she refused him admission to her house. If she talked....? No, she dare not say anything without giving herself away. He was master of the situation.

The little nursemaid opened the door. She looked just as usual. He was relieved as if he had expected to see her a figure of consternation. "Madame is well?"

"Oh! yes sir, as always," and she showed him into the drawing room. He went straight to the mantelpiece to inspect himself and the state of his hair; and he was fixing his tie before the glass when he saw the young woman behind him looking at him on the threshold of the room.

He pretended not to have seen her and they contemplated one another in the mirror a little while before he turned round. She hadn't moved; seemed to be waiting. She opened her arms, nestled against his chest, looked up at him. A long embrace.

He thought: "It's easier than I would ever have believed, everything's going like clockwork." And when his lips left hers he smiled, without saying a word, trying to infuse into his look an infinity of love. He kissed her fingers, whispering: "Thanks. I worship you," and she took his arm as if he

had been her husband. They sat side by side on the couch.

Now was the moment for him to talk; skilled, practised, seductive talk. He knew it, but to his exasperation words eluded him. He mumbled: "Then you do like me a little."

She put her finger on his lips, "Be quiet."

They sat together silent, their glances mingling, burning fingers entwined. "How I want you!" he said.

She repeated: "Be quiet."

They heard the maid moving plates in the hall behind the walls. He got up, "I can't sit so near you; I shall lose my head."

The door opened. "Madame is served," and he solemnly offered his arm. They lunched facing one another, smiling together, engrossed solely in each other, wrapped in the soft charm of love just beginning. They ate unknowingly. He felt a foot, a tiny foot touch his under the table and instantly imprisoned it between both his own and held it there, pressing it firmly.

The maid came and went, brought the courses and took them away, with an everyday composure, appearing to notice nothing.

The meal finished they returned to the drawing room sitting on the couch side by side again.

By degrees he edged close to her, trying to clasp her. She coolly snubbed him. "Take care. Someone might come in."

He murmured: "When shall I be able to see you alone, to show you how I love you."

She pinched his ear and whispered very softly: "I'm going to pay you a little call at your place, one of these days."

He felt himself flushing, "It is...my place...it's...it's very humble."

She smiled, "What does that matter. It's you I'm going to see, not the room."

He pressed her to say when she would come. She appointed a day at the end of the following week. Immediately he began to worry her to make it earlier, with halting words, eyes shining, pressing her to him, gripping her hands, fevered flushed face torn by desire, that impetuous desire which so

often follows a meal *tête-à-tête*.

It amused her to see him begging so ardently and she yielded a day at a time. But he kept repeating: "To-morrow...say it...to-morrow!"

In the end she gave in, "Yes, to-morrow, five o'clock."

He heaved a long sigh of relief; and now they talked almost calmly, with friendly intimacy as if they had known one another twenty years.

They were startled by a knock at the door, and quickly moved apart. She murmured: "It may be Laurine."

The child appeared, amazed, then ran towards Duroy, clapping her hands transported with delight at seeing him. She cried: "Ah! Bel-Ami." Mme de Marelle laughed.

"There! Bel-Ami! Laurine has baptized you. It's a nice little nickname for you. I shall call you that too. Bel-Ami."

He had taken the little girl on his knee and had to play all the little games he had taught her.

He stayed nearly three hours before returning to the office, and on the staircase by the half opened door he murmured softly again: "To-morrow. Five o'clock."

"Yes," she said smiling and disappeared.

Directly his work was over he considered how he was to arrange his room to receive his mistress and how best to disguise its poverty. He got the idea of decorating the walls with Japanese trinkets and for five francs he bought quite a collection of little masks, dolls and drawings, with which he covered up the worst of the disfiguring stains. He stuck transparent pictures on the window panes representing boats on rivers, flights of birds across red skies, multi-coloured ladies leaning over balconies and funny little black men strutting across snow-covered plains. His room, just big enough to sleep and sit down in, soon looked like the inside of a paper lantern. He was satisfied with it and passed the evening pasting on the ceiling all the coloured birds he had left. Then he lay down lulled by the whistling of the trains.

The next day he came back early, bringing a box of cakes and a bottle of Madeira bought at the nearby wine shop; and

set out this collation on his toilet table, its dirty wood hidden by a napkin and the washhand basin and water jug concealed below.

Then he waited.

She came at about five-fifteen and was charmed by his quaint decorative scheme. "Why your home is quite nice," she said, "but what a crowd on the staircase." He took her in his arms and through her veil passionately kissed the hair between her forehead and her hat.

An hour and a half later he escorted her to the cab-stand in the rue de Rome. When she was in the cab he whispered. "Tuesday, the same time," and she answered: "The same time, Tuesday." It was dark by then and she drew his head through the open window and kissed his lips; then the coachman flicking his horse, she cried: "Goodbye Bel-Ami," and the old cab rumbled off to the weary trot of its white horse.

For three weeks Duroy received Mme de Marelle in this way, every two or three days, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening.

While he was waiting for her one afternoon a tremendous hubbub on the staircase brought him to his door. A furious voice, a man's, shouted: "What the hell is the little devil yelling for?" to which the shrill exasperated voice of a woman answered: "It's that woman who comes to see the journalist higher up. She's knocked Nicky over on the landing. That sort of woman doesn't bother about children on landings. They ought not to be allowed here."

Duroy, dismayed, drew back, hearing a quick rustle of petticoats and a hasty step climbing the storey below his.

He just had time to shut the door when there was a knock, and Mme de Marelle burst in, breathless, hysterical, collapsed.

"Did you hear?"

He pretended ignorance: "Hear what?"

"How they insulted me?"

"Whom do you mean, they?"

"The wretches living below."

"No, I heard nothing. What have they been saying to you?"

She started sobbing violently unable to get out a word. He had to take her hat off, loosen her clothes, bathe her temples; she was choking; then as the hysteria calmed down a little, all her wrathful indignation returned. She wanted him to go down at once and beat them up, massacre them, anything.

He tried to soothe her: "But you know what they are, working people, clods. Remember they will go to the police, you will be identified, perhaps arrested, certainly ruined. We can't mix ourselves up with people like that."

She passed to another idea; "What are we going to do then? I can never come here again."

He answered: "It's quite simple. I'll clear out."

She murmured: "That will take time." Then quite suddenly she thought of a solution and brightened up in a second.

"No, listen. I've got it. Leave it to me. To-morrow morning I shall send you a 'little blue.' " "Little blue" was the name she had coined for private telegrams.

She was smiling now, enchanted with her solution. But, even in the abandonment of love's recklessness, nothing would induce her to reveal it to him.

She was still shaken, and going down the staircase her limbs trembled so much that she had to lean on his arm with all her strength.

They met no one.

As he stayed up late he was still in bed at eleven the next morning when the telegraph messenger brought him the promised "little blue."

He opened it and read: "Be at 127 rue de Constantinople at five sharp. Tell them to open the flat let to Mme Duroy. Your Clo."

At exactly five he entered the concierge's room of a large mansion and asked. "Is this where Mme Duroy has taken a flat?"

The man, doubtless accustomed to delicate situations where prudence is necessary, looked him over, then selecting a key from his bunch of them: "You are M. Duroy?"

"Certainly."

The concierge opened a small two roomed flat on the ground

floor, facing his office.

The living room was hung with flowered wall paper, only fairly clean, with mahogany furniture covered with greenish silk and a shabby carpet so thin that treading on it one could feel the wood underneath. The bed room was so tiny that the bed took up three parts of it; a large bed was hung with dull blue curtains, also of silk, with a red silk eider-down spread on it blotted with suspicious looking stains.

Duroy, uneasy and put out thought: "This flat's going to cost me a devil of a lot of money. I shall have to arrange a loan. What an idiot she was to have taken it."

The door opened and Clotilde, arms outstretched, rushed in like a hurricane with a tremendous clatter. She was overjoyed, transported: "Isn't it lovely, say, isn't it sweet? No stairs to climb, on the ground floor, right on the street. I can come in and go out by the window with not a soul to see, not even the concierge. Now we will love one another here."

He kissed her gloomily, not daring to put the question trembling on his lips. She had placed a large parcel on the table in the middle of the room. She opened it and took out soap, a bottle of lavender water, a sponge, a packet of pins, a button hook, and a little pair of curling tongs for her hair which was always becoming disarranged.

She chattered away, pulling the drawers open. "I shall have to bring some undies to be able to change occasionally. It's going to be awfully convenient. If I get caught in a shower I can pop in here and dry myself and change. We will each have our own key besides the one in the lodge in case we forget our own. I've taken it for three months, in your name, of course. I couldn't give my own."

Then he put his question: "Might I ask what the rent is?"

She answered ingenuously: "But, my dear, it's paid."

"Then I am in your debt? May I again ask how much for?"

"No, no, darling, It's no business of yours. This is my foolish little venture, all on my own."

He put on an aggrieved expression: "Certainly not. I could never allow that."

She came and put her hands on his shoulders, prettily

entreating. "Now, George, dear, do let me. It will give me such happiness, so much joy to know that this is mine, our nest, all mine. Don't be cross. There's nothing for you to be difficult about. Why should there be. I want to make this present to our love myself. Say it's all right, my little Geo: say you agree?..." She begged it of him with looks, lips, with her whole being. He acted his part, disgruntled, angrily refusing, gradually persuaded, giving in, won over.

And when she had gone he said to himself rubbing his palms together: "Not too bad. It's really not too bad."

Some days later he received another "little blue": "My husband arrives this evening after eight weeks' inspection. So we shall be apart for eight days. What a bore! Thy Clo."

Duroy was much perturbed. He had never given a thought to the fact that she was a married woman and here was a man whose face he would like to have seen just once so as to recognize him.

He waited patiently for the husband's departure; but he passed two evenings at the Folies-Bergère which meant two nights in Rachael's room. Then one morning another telegram came with four words: "Presently five o'clock. Clo."

They were both before time. She threw herself into his arms with complete abandonment, covering his face with kisses, then she suggested: "If you like, when we have loved, you can take me to dinner somewhere. I'm quite free."

It was the first of the month and although his pay was mortgaged far in advance and he owed money on all sides Duroy happened to be in funds and was not sorry at spending some of it on her,

He replied. "Anywhere you like darling." So they set out at about seven and reached the outer boulevard. She leaned heavily on him and whispered: "If you only knew how happy it makes me to take your arm and to feel you pressing against me."

He asked: "Shall we go to Lathuille's?"

"No, no, it's far too respectable. I want something low down, vulgar, somewhere where labourers and working girls go; I love the crowds in little country pubs! If we could

only have gone into the country.”

He knew no place of that kind in the neighbourhood and finally they entered a grog shop where they served meals in a separate dining room. She had noticed it first, seeing through the window two young girls eating with two soldiers.

Three cabmen were feeding at the end of the long straight room and a personage impossible to classify in any line of life was stretched out on a chair, legs outspread, hands in his trousers-pockets, smoking a pipe, his head turned away towards the bar. His coat looked like a museum of grease spots, and from his pockets, puffed out like so many bellies, protruded the neck of a bottle, a piece of dirty bread, a parcel wrapped in newspaper and a ball of string. His hair was grey black, thick, woolly, curly and filthy, and his cap was on the ground under his seat. Clotilde's stylish elegance made her entry a sensation. The two couples stopped their chatter, the cabbies stopped arguing and the oddity having removed his pipe from his mouth and spat vigorously in front of him, turned his head a little to glance at them.

Mme de Marelle murmured: “Isn't it lovely? We shall enjoy ourselves here; another time I shall dress myself up like a workgirl,” and without the least embarrassment or distaste she sat down at the table, polished by the gravy of bygone dinners, washed by old spilled drinks and cleaned by a flick of the waiter's napkin. Duroy constrained and a little disgusted looked about for a hatstand to hang his tall hat on, finding none, put it under his chair. They dined on a ragout, lamb cutlets and a salad. Clotilde repeated: “This is the sort of thing I love. It amuses me far more than the café Anglais.” Then she added: “If you want to give me real pleasure take me to a tavern ball. I know a very quaint one near here. It's called la Reine Blanche,”

Duroy was amazed and asked: “Who ever took you to such a place?” He looked at her and saw her blush, a little troubled in mind too as if the abrupt question had reawakened in her a delicate treasured memory.

After one of those typical feminine hesitations, so brief that they are almost imperceptible she replied: “A friend,” add-

ing after a pause, "who is dead." And she lowered her eyes with perfectly natural sadness.

Duroy for the first time realized how very little he knew of the past life of this woman and he reflected on it uneasily. Of course, she had had lovers before but of what kind? Of what world? A vague jealousy, a sort of hostility awakened in him towards her, hostility towards everything of which he was ignorant, for everything which had not belonged to him in her heart and in that other life. He looked at her, irritated at all the mystery and secrecy hidden in that pretty, silent little head which was dreaming even now perhaps, with regret of another man, of other men. How he would have liked to have peered into her mind, to ransack it, to know everything and understand it!

She repeated: "Will you take me to the Reine Blanche? It will round off our evening."

He thought, "Bah! what does the past matter? I'm a fool to bother myself about it." Then, smiling: "Certainly darling."

When they were in the streets, she said, softly, in that tone of mystery in which one makes intimate disclosures, "I didn't dare ask you this till now. But you can't think how I love these tomboy escapades, in all these places where ladies are not supposed to be. When the Carnival is on I dress up as a college boy. I make a really attractive student."

When they entered the dancing saloon she kept close to him, looking with fascinated eyes at the street women and their bullies. She was terrified and happy all together, and from time to time as though to reassure herself against possible trouble she would say, gazing at a policeman stolid and motionless. "That policeman has a solid look about him." After a quarter of an hour she had had enough and he saw her home.

This was the beginning of a series of excursions to all kinds of dubious resorts; and Duroy discovered a wild gipsy strain in his mistress, a passionate love for the haunts of vagabondage.

She would arrive at the usual rendezvous, in working dress, with a housemaid's cap on her head. But she was a house-

maid of the stage; and in spite of the careful simplicity of her attire she would keep on her bangles, rings, bracelets and diamond ear-rings, giving the explanation when he asked her to remove them. "Nonsense. They'll think they're all sham."

She flattered herself she was completely disguised and though, in fact, she was only hiding ostrich fashion, she made her way into all sorts of drinking dens of the vilest repute.

She wanted Duroy to dress up like a working man; but he obstinately refused, sticking to the precise correct turn-out of the boulevardier, declining even to change his tall hat for a work-a-day one.

She consoled herself for his obstinacy in her own quaint way. "They will take me for a chambermaid lucky enough to have been picked up by a young swell," and she found the comedy delicious.

They went into one of these pothouses and sat down in the smokeladen hovel, on creaking chairs before a rickety wooden table. A cloud of foul smoke mixed with the smell of stale fish filled the whole place, men in blouses drinking raw spirits were bawling out indecencies, and the waiter, astounded at seeing this strange couple placed a couple of cherry brandies before them.

She, trembling, frightened and altogether delighted drank her liqueur in little sips, looking around her with sparkling uneasy eyes. Each cherry as she swallowed it, gave her the feeling of a grave error committed, every taste of the warm spiced liqueur brought a sense of bitter pleasure, the joy of unhealthy, noxious, forbidden gratification.

At last she said "Let's go now," and they left the place. She made a theatrical exit, like an actress leaving the stage, passing self-consciously between the sprawling soakers who glowered at her with sullen hostile eyes, and when they reached the door, she gave a sigh of relief as if she had just escaped from some dire peril.

Sometimes she would ask Duroy shivering: "Suppose I was assaulted in one of these places, what would you do?" And he would arrogantly reply: "Defend you of course;" and she would squeeze his arm happily with a hot strange

desire, to see men fighting for her, even those bullies inside fighting her lover.

But these outings two or three times every week began to bore Duroy. He was finding it increasingly difficult to raise the half-loans it cost to pay for them.

He found it hard to carry on from day to day now: harder even than in his Great Northern days, the result of his first months in journalism when he had spent recklessly with the constant hope of earning vast sums on the morrow. Now he had exhausted all his resources and every means of raising money.

The simple expedient of touching the cashier was now completely used up and he already owed the paper four months' pay as well as six hundred francs advance commission. He also owed a hundred francs to Forestier, three hundred to the well-to-do Jacques Rival and he was hemmed in on all sides by a mass of petty debts.

Saint-Potin, resourceful wily man though he was, was unable to suggest any expedient to raise another hundred francs; and Duroy was becoming nervy and exasperated at his plight, more pressing now than in the old days, his needs being greater. Sullen resentment towards everyone brooded in him and rasping irritability which he could not control and which flared up without warning for any trifling reason. Reckoning up he gloomily told himself that it cost him at least a thousand francs a month to live without any excessive or out of the way expenditure and not counting new clothes, footwear, linen and laundry. So on December 14th he found himself with no money whatever in his pocket and without a hope in the world of raising any.

Doing without lunch seemed like old times, and he passed the afternoon in the office, working, sulky and preoccupied.

Towards four o'clock he received a "little blue" from his mistress: "Shall we dine together? Afterwards we'll go for an outing."

He replied immediately: "Impossible to dine." then reflecting that he might as well enjoy himself with her, added: "But I shall expect you at nine at our flat." And, after

sending one of the office boys with the message to save the cost of a telegram, he pondered on how he was to secure an evening meal. At seven o'clock he was still without an idea; and by then he was terribly hungry. Then he thought of a desperate expedient. He waited till all his colleagues had left and when he was alone, briskly sounded his bell. The Director's secretary answered it.

Duroy was standing up, fumbling in his pocket. He spoke sharply: "I say, Foucart, I've left my purse at home and I've got to dine at the Luxemburgh. You might lend me fifty sous for my cab."

The clerk took three francs from his pocket and said: "Will that be enough, sir."

"Oh! yes, quite enough, thanks very much."

And, taking the three silver coins, Duroy ran down the staircase and dined at one of the eating houses of his "down and out" days.

At nine o'clock, with his feet to the fire, he awaited his mistress in the little living room.

She arrived, gay, happy, rosy faced from the fresh air of the street. "If you feel like it," she said, "we'll go for a stroll first and return here at eleven. It's lovely now for a walk."

He answered glumly: "Why go out? It's not too bad here."

She answered without removing her hat: "It's beautiful outside, such a marvellous moon. It's the very evening to go out."

"Very likely, but I don't happen to want to go out."

He had said the words angrily. She was startled and hurt. "What's the matter with you? Why do you speak to me like that? I only want to go for a stroll. There's nothing to annoy you in that."

He rose, exasperated: "It doesn't annoy me. It bores me. There, now you've got it."

She was one of those women whom opposition irritates and rudeness hardens.

She answered him disdainfully with cold anger.

"I'm not used to being spoken to like that. I'll go alone then. Good-bye."

He saw that she meant what she said, and springing towards her, took her hands, kissing them, and stammered out: "Forgive me, darling, forgive me, I'm upset this evening, all on edge. I've had all kind of annoyances, business worries, you know."

She was a trifle softened but by no means appeased.

"Your business affairs are no concern of mine; and I'm certainly not going to bear the brunt of your bad temper."

He took her in his arms, urging her towards the sofa.

"Listen, my little one, I wouldn't hurt you for anything. I wasn't thinking what I was saying."

He had forced her to sit down and was kneeling in front of her.

"You have forgiven me, say, you have forgiven me."

She said coldly: "Perhaps, but don't begin again." And rising to her feet, added: "Now, let's go for a walk."

He was still at her feet, clasping her thighs with both hands.

"I beg of you," he faltered, "to stay here. I entreat you. Do me that favour. This evening I do so want to keep you near me, by yourself for me alone, here, by the fire. Say 'yes.' I beg you to say 'yes.'"

She answered peremptorily, obstinately: "No, I intend to go out. I shall not give in to your moods."

He persisted: "Do please. I have a reason, a very serious reason."

She reiterated, "No. And if you don't want to come with me, I'm going, goodbye." She shook herself free and reached the door. He ran after her, caught her up in his arms "Listen, Clo, my little Olo, do this for me..." She shook her head without answering, avoiding his kisses, trying to free herself from his clasp to leave.

He pleaded with her: "Clo, my darling, Clo, I have a reason."

She stopped, looking him in the face: "You're lying about something...what is it?" He reddened, not knowing what to say. She was furiously indignant.

"You know quite well you're lying...you dirty cad." And with a violent gesture her eyes full of tears, she fled.

He caught her again, by the shoulders and plunged in gloom, ready to own up to everything to avoid this rupture, declared tonelessly : "It's simply that I haven't got a sou. Now you know."

She pulled up short, her eyes probing his to read the truth : "What did you say?"

He had flushed to the roots of his hair, "I said that I haven't got a sou. D'you understand now, Not twenty sous, not ten sous, not anything to pay even for a glass of lime juice in any café we should have gone in. You force me to tell you the humiliating truth. It would have been hardly the thing for me to have gone out with you and then when seated at the table before two dinners to tell you calmly that I couldn't pay for them."

She still stared at him intently: "Then...it is really true ...Such a..."

In a second he turned out all his pockets, trousers, waistcoat, coat and muttered: "These...are you satisfied... pleased ...happy...now?"

Abruptly opening both her arms wide, with passionate devotion she clung to his neck, nestling to him, faltering: "Oh! my poor dear...my poor dear...if only I'd known! How did it all happen?"

She made him sit down and on his knee, kissing his face, his eyes, his lips, she forced him to tell her how his misfortunes had come about.

It was a moving enough story that he invented. He had been obliged to come to the aid of his old father who had fallen on bad times. It had not only cost him all his savings but had involved him heavily in debt.

He added: "I shall have to go on short commons for at least another six months, as I've had to mortgage all my resources. It can't be helped. Life holds these moments of disaster; and, after all, money isn't everything."

She whispered into his ear: "Let me lend you some," and he replied loftily: "It's very sweet of you my pet, but never

make such a suggestion again please. It hurts me."

She was silent. Then taking him in her arms, murmured: "You will never know how dear you are to me."

One of their best evenings of love followed.

As she was leaving she said with a smile: "In a plight like yours, how nice it would be to find some money one had forgotten in one's clothes. A coin slipped through the coat lining, or anything;" and he agreed with considerable earnestness.

She insisted on going home on foot, making the full moon an excuse and going into rhapsodies over it. •

It was a cold serene night at the beginning of winter. Pedestrians and horses went quickly stimulated by the clear frost. Their heels beat a tattoo on the pavements.

Leaving him she asked: "Shall we meet the day after tomorrow in the afternoon?"

"Yes, rather."

"At the same time?"

"At the same time."

"Goodnight, dearest." And they embraced tenderly.

He walked home at great speed trying to evolve some scheme to enable him to carry on, through the next day. But, as he opened the door of his room and felt in his waistcoat pocket for matches, he was annoyed to feel the touch of a coin. He took it out and examined it. It was a louis—twenty francs. He thought he must be mad. He turned it over again and again wondering by what miracles it could have got there. It couldn't have fallen from heaven into his pocket. Then suddenly, he guessed and flushed with anger. Hadn't she joked about money slipping through coat linings and how welcome it would be in hard up days? His mistress had given him charity! What a humiliation!

He swore: "Well, I'm receiving her this afternoon and she shall have a fine quarter of an hour."

And he went to bed, seething with anger and shame.

He awoke late. He was hungry and tried to go to sleep again so as not to get up till two o'clock; then he muttered: "This is getting me nowhere, I've got to get hold of some

money somehow." He went out, hoping for some inspiration in the street. None came but, passing every restaurant a burning desire to eat filled his dry mouth with saliva. At midday, having thought of nothing, he abruptly made up his mind: "Hell! I'll have lunch out of Clotilde's twenty francs. That won't stop me paying her back to-morrow." He lunched in a brasserie for two francs fifty. Going into the office he repaid the three francs to the clerk: "Here you are Foucart, the cash you lent me yesterday for my cab."

He worked till seven. Then he went to dinner and drew another three francs from her money. Three evening beers brought his expenses for the day to nine francs thirty centimes.

But as he couldn't raise any credit or manage a loan within twenty-four hours he borrowed another six francs fifty from the twenty that he ought to repay her that evening, with the result that he turned up at the rendezvous with exactly four francs twenty in his pocket.

He was in a temper, like a snarling dog, and promised himself to make short work of the matter. He would say to his mistress: "You know I found that twenty francs you put in my pocket. I can't pay it back to-day because my position is just the same, and I haven't had time to go into money matters. But I shall repay it, the very next time we meet."

She arrived, tender, eager, tremulous, fearful. How was he going to greet her? And she embraced him ardently to avoid being called on for an immediate explanation. On his side he told himself: "There's plenty of time, all the evening, to broach the subject. I'll wait for the right moment." He didn't find the 'right moment' and said nothing, putting off the introduction of the delicate and awkward subject.

She did not suggest going out and was altogether charming.

They parted at about midnight, making only one appointment for the week following, the Wednesday, Mme de Marelle having dinner engagements in the city for every other night.

The next day, taking his money out to pay for his lunch, Duroy discovered that his coins had become five and one of them was gold.

At first he thought that he had been given the twenty-franc

piece by mistake in change the evening before but soon enlightenment came and he shrank under the humiliation of this perseverance in almsgiving. How he regretted not having tackled her. If he had done that forcibly this would never have happened.

For four days he struggled and exerted himself without avail to raise five louis, and then he ate up Clotilde's second one.

She waited her opportunity, although this time he did say wrathfully, "Don't try that joke on again. It annoys me," and slipped another twenty francs into his trouser pocket the next time they met.

When he found them he swore; and slipped them into his waistcoat pocket ready to his hand, for apart from them he hadn't one centime.

He salved his conscience by saying: "I'll return the whole lot to her in a lump. It's not a gift, only money lent...."

At last the cashier of the paper, under desperate pressure, consented to let him have a hundred sous a day, advance. It just enabled him to eat, but was not enough to let him restore sixty francs.

And at length, Clotilde being again in the grip of her obsession for nocturnal excursions to all the lowest haunts in Paris, he no longer put himself out at finding a 'yellow boy' in one of his pockets, in his box, his watch case, anywhere after their adventurous expeditions. Since she was determined to indulge in these freakish whims which he was not in a position at the moment to pay for, there was no reason why she should not pay for them herself rather than give them up. He kept an account of all her monetary presents for future repayment.

One evening she said: "D'you know I've never been to the Folies-Bergère? will you take me?" He hesitated, afraid of running into Rachael. Then he thought: "Hell, I'm not married after all. If she does see me she'll understand the situation and look the other way, and, anyway, we'll take a box."

There was another reason. He would be able to treat Mme de Marelle to a box at the theatre without having to pay for

it which, in its way, was a sort of compensation.

He left Clotilde in the carriage while he went to get the free pass, so that she would think he had paid for the box and then escorted her into the theatre, smartly saluted by all the attendants.

An enormous crowd filled the promenade, as they made their way with considerable difficulty through the mass of men and prostitutes. But they found themselves in their box at last, entrenched between the silent orchestra and the riff-raff in the gallery.

Mme de Marelle hardly even glanced at the stage; she was fascinated by the women prowling ceaselessly behind her back. She was continually turning round to look at them. She wanted to touch them, feel their bodies, their cheeks, their hair, to know what these strange creatures were made of.

Suddenly she exclaimed: "There's a fat brunette keeps looking at us. I really think she's going to speak to us. Have you noticed her?"

He told her that she was mistaken, but for some time past he had seen Rachael hovering round them, anger smouldering in her eyes and tempestuous words on her lips.

Duroy had brushed past her a little while before in the crowd, and she had murmured softly "Good evening" with a wink of the eye which said: "I understand." But he had made no response to her greeting, passing on coldly, haughtily and with a sneer, afraid of any recognition being seen by his mistress.

The girl, goaded by unconscious jealousy, turned round and brushed past him again saying a little louder: "Good evening Georges."

Again, he made no reply. By now she was obstinately determined to be recognized and greeted and returned time after time to the back of the box, waiting a favourable opportunity.

As soon as she saw Mme de Marelle looking at her, she touched Duroy on the shoulder with her finger: "Good evening, How are you?"

He didn't even look round, and she went on: "Well! Well!

Have you been struck deaf since Thursday?"

He spoke not a word, trying to assume a look of contempt which made it impossible to lower himself even by a word before such insolence. She began to laugh—a vicious laugh—and said: "So you've become dumb as well? Perhaps Madame has bitten of your tongue."

He made an enraged gesture and said furiously: "How dare you speak to me! Be off or I'll give you in charge."

At this with eyes blazing, and choking with rage, she shrieked: "Ah! so that's how it is eh! You miserable cad! When one sleeps with a woman, one at least, passes the time to her. It's only because you've got hold of another woman now, that you won't deign to notice me to-day. If you had made as much as one little sign when I passed against you just now I would have kept quiet. But you wanted to play the little gentleman eh? You think you can make a convenience of me, damn you! Ah! It wasn't only 'Good evening' you said to me when I...." She would have gone on screaming indefinitely but Mme de Marelle had opened the door of the box and taken refuge in the crowd, frantically looking for the exit.

Duroy plunged after her struggling to get to her. And Rachael, seeing them both in full flight bawled triumphantly: "Stop her! Stop that woman! She's stolen my lover."

The crowd entered into the spirit of it with derisive laughter. Two men jeered at Mme de Marelle, caught her by the shoulders, pulled her body to them, handled her, tried to kiss her. But Duroy, pushing his way through, violently released her and dragged her into the street. She staggered into a cab outside the theatre. He leapt in beside her and to the driver's 'where to?' answered distractedly: "Good God, anywhere."

The carriage rattled slowly along the street. Clotilde shaking all over in violent spasms seemed to be choking, suffocating; and Duroy knew neither what to do nor what to say.

At length, as she sobbed convulsively, he began to plead: "Listen Clo, my little Clo, let me explain! It's not my fault....I used to know this woman years ago....in the old

days...."

She roughly pushed his face away with the fury of the loving woman betrayed, filled with frantic rage which made her almost speechless, and stammered out in jerky staccato stuttering phrases: "Ah! wretch....despicable....what unbelievable treachery....Is it possible? What humiliation....My God....what disgrace...."

Then carried away more and more as glimmerings of ideas and arguments began to penetrate: "It was with my money you paid her....didn't you....And I gave him the money....he used on her....that girl....for her....what a wretch....on her."

For some moments she seemed to be searching for some more biting word, then suddenly she spat violently with a gesture of indescribable contempt: "Oh....swine....swine....swine....you paid her with my money....swine....swine." She could find no other expletive and repeated it again and again: "swine....swine." Suddenly she leaned out of the cab and pulled the driver's sleeve: "Stop!" then opening the door she leapt into the street.

Georges made to follow her but she screamed, "I forbid you to get out," so stridently that a crowd began to collect around her; and he stayed inside terrified of a public scandal.

Then she produced her purse, sought out some money by the light of the lamp and put two francs fifty in the cabbie's hand, saying in loud ringing tones: "There....that pays you for an hour....it's my money....I am paying....and take that lout inside there to rue Boursault aux Batignolles." A ripple of amused laughter ran through the crowd; a man said: "Well done little Spitfire" and a young rascal standing by the cab pushed his head through the open door, saying "Good-night little gentleman" with mocking emphasis on the last word. The carriage rumbled off to the sound of loud laughter.

CHAPTER VI

GEORGES DUROY had a gloomy awakening the next morning.

He dressed slowly and sat down by the window, thinking things out. He had a numbed sensation throughout his whole body as though the night before he had been knocked out by a cudgel.

At length the urgent need of raising money roused him and he set out for the Forestiers' flat.

His friend received him in his study, his feet before the fire.

"What is it that's got you up so early?"

"A very serious matter. I owe a debt of honour."

"Gambling debt?"

He hesitated, then blurted out "Yes."

"A big one?"

"Five hundred francs."

Forestier, very sceptical, rapped out suddenly:

"To whom do you owe it?" and Duroy, taken off his guard, stumbled badly. "To...to...to a M de Carville."

"Ah! and where does he live?"

"Rue...Rue..."

Forestier burst out laughing, "Rue Nowhere Number nil eh? I used to know that gentleman well, old chap. If twenty francs is any use to you, I can let you have it, but not a centime more."

Duroy accepted the gold piece.

Then he went from door to door trying all his acquaintances and finished up towards five o'clock with eighty francs.

As he was still two hundred francs short, he kept what he had got together for himself muttering: "Devil take it, I'm not going to make myself ill over that little bitch. I'll pay her when I can."

For fifteen days he led a spartan life, regular, austere, full of good resolutions. Then quite suddenly desire assailed him

again. It seemed years since he had held a woman in his arms and like a sailor yearning for dry land, every skirt he saw made him tremble.

So, one evening he turned up again at the Folies-Bergère hoping to find Rachael there. He saw her at once in the vestibule, for the theatre was her regular beat. He approached her smiling, hand outstretched. She measured him from top to toe: "What d'you want?"

He tried to laugh: "Come, don't bear malice."

She turned on her heels declaring: "I don't consort with
— 1."

She had sought out the filthiest epithet in her vocabulary. He felt the blood rush to his face and returned home alone.

Forestier, sick, weak and always coughing, now-a-days led him a troublous life at the office, seeming to go out of his way to find him tedious assignments. One day even, in a moment of nervous irritation, after a prolonged bout of coughing he growled: "My God, you are more stupid than I would have believed humanly possible." This was because Duroy had failed to bring back some copy he had ordered.

Duroy felt like knocking him down, but held himself in and went out muttering: "I'll pay you for that one of these days." A lightning thought crossed his mind and he added: "I'll make a cuckold of you, old friend." And, as he left he rubbed his hands together rejoiced at his project.

He resolved to put it into execution the very next day, and paid a call on Mme Forestier—a reconnoitring expedition as he termed it.

He found her reading a book, reclining on the sofa.

She held out her hand, without moving, only turning her head: "Hullo Bel-Ami," she said.

He felt as if she had suddenly boxed his ears. "Why do you call me that?" he mumbled.

She returned, smiling: "I saw Mme de Marelle a week or two ago and she told me they have given you that name at her place."

The young woman's easy smile reassured him and he wonder-

¹ Untranslatable abuse.

ed why he had been so concerned.

She went on: "You spoil her; and pay a duty call on me when you feel like it, on the thirty-sixth of the month, and as seldom as you can." He sat down near her and looked at her with new interest. She was very charming, fair with a delicate tender warm freshness, made for caresses and he thought: "She's certainly far more desirable than the other one." He had not the least doubt of success, it looked as if he had only to stretch out his hand and take her, like picking a ripe plum.

He said impressively: "I've not been to see you because it was better not to."

Puzzled, she asked: "What? Why?"

"Why? Can't you guess?"

"No. I haven't the faintest idea."

"Because I'm in love with you... Oh! a little, only a little as yet... but I don't want it to become the real thing."

She didn't seem astonished, nor vexed or flattered; she simply continued to smile her serene indifferent smile and replied composedly: "Oh!... You can come just the same. No one is ever in love with me for long."

He was taken aback; more by her tone than by her words and he asked. "Why?"

"Because it is useless and I make that quite clear to them right away. If you had told me before what you were afraid of, I would have put you right and got you to call as often as you could."

Quite crestfallen he said lugubriously: "As if one could control one's feelings automatically!"

She turned to him: "My dear friend, for me, a man in love is simply erased from the number of the living. He becomes an idiot and not merely an idiot but dangerous. With men who fall in love with me or pretend they do I cease to have friendly relationship whatever. I do it, first because they bore me and also they are to be avoided, like one keeps out of the way of a mad dog. I put them in moral quarantine till the complaint is cured. Don't forget that. I know very well that what you call love is merely a form of appetite, greed, lust,

while to me love is a kind of...of...communion of souls, something that men like you haven't got it in you to understand. You understand the letter...I, the spirit. But...look me straight in the face."

She was no longer smiling. Her face was calm and cold, and she said, weighing every word: "Let this sink in, once and for all; I will never be your mistress, never. Is that definite enough? There is not the faintest possibility of it. Not only that, if you persist it will bring harm to you. And now...now that the operation is finished...would you like to be friends, good friends, loyal chums and nothing else?"

He realized that this was a sentence from which there was no appeal, before which any further overtures would be merely ridiculous. He took the rebuke in the right spirit and quite suddenly found that the chance of such a comradeship delighted him. He held out both hands.

"I am yours Madame in any way that pleases you."

She sensed real sincerity in his voice and gave him her hands. He kissed them, one after the other and raising his head, said simply: "Dear God! if only I had found a woman like you, with what happiness I would have married her!"

She was touched, caressed by the phrase, as women are by compliments really coming from the heart and she gave him one of those quick grateful looks by which they make men their slaves.

Then as he didn't find it easy to change the trend of their conversation, she laid a finger on his arm and said softly:

"I'm going to start my job as a friend right away. My friend you lack tact..." She hesitated, then asked: "May I speak freely?"

"Yes."

"Quite openly."

"Of course."

"Well! go and see Mme Walter. She likes you and you attract her. You will find an opportunity there for your compliments, although, remember this, she is a good woman, perfectly straight. Don't make any mistake about that. There's no hope of any of your...of your freebooting in that

quarter. You will like her better the more you know her. I know that your position in the paper is only a junior one. But don't worry about that. They're always very pleased to see all their reporters. Take my advice and go."

He smiled and said: "Thanks. You're an angel, a guardian angel." Then they chatted about other things.

He stayed a long while wanting her to know that he liked to be with her on the new terms, and leaving he asked:

"Then it's agreed we are friends."

"Agreed."

He leaned forward and added: "If you should ever become a widow, I have made my claim;" and he hurried out, fearing he had shocked her.

This idea of a call on Mme Walter worried him, for he had never been invited to call and was anxious not to court a snub. But the Director had always been genial to him, valued his services and picked him out in preference to others for difficult assignments. There was no reason, he told himself, why he should not profit by this obvious goodwill and secure an entrée to the house.

He made up his mind to try, and rising early morning he sallied forth to the market and bought for ten francs or so, some twenty choice pears. These he carefully packed to make believe they came from the country and took them to her concierge's lodge. With them he left his card on which he had written.

"GEORGES DUROY

"With compliments begs Mme Walter's acceptance of some fruit, received by him this morning from Normandy."

Next morning he found in his letter box, an envelope containing a card. Mme Walter's, "who thanks M Georges Duroy very much and is at home on Saturdays."

M Walter lived in the Boulevard Malesherbes, in a vast mansion which he owned but of which, with the economy of his race, he let out part. A concierge, gorgeous in a uniform like a church beadle's, his fat calves swathed in white stockings, in a gold buttoned coat with scarlet lapels, adorned the entrance impressively, if flamboyantly.

The reception rooms were on the first storey, hung with tapestries and closed in by curtains. Two sleepy valets were dozing on benches. One of them took Duroy's overcoat, the other relieved him of his cane, opened a door, preceded the visitor by some paces, and then stood aside to let him pass, proclaiming his name loudly into an empty room.

The embarrassed young man looked around him and in a mirror perceived some people seated. They seemed a long way off. Confused by the reflection he started off in the wrong direction, then he passed through two drawing rooms into a little boudoir pretty with gold and blue silk, where four ladies were chatting over cups of tea.

His reporter's job with its constant association with well known persons had given Duroy a measure of self-confidence. Nonetheless his awkward entrance and the passage through deserted rooms made him nervous.

He faltered out: "Madame I have given myself the pleasure..." all the time trying to catch the hostess's eye.

She held out her hand, saying, as he bowed over it, "It's very nice of you to come and see me," and indicated a chair, into which, thinking it higher than it was, he fell with a jerk.

It was a terribly boring affair. One of the women was holding forth. She was babbling about the cold weather not being severe enough to halt the typhoid epidemic or to allow skating, and all of them one after the other pronounced their verdicts on this advent of frost in Paris, expounding their preferences for the various seasons, with all the accompanying banal trivialities customary to these occasions. A slight noise made Duroy turn his head and he saw in two mirrors a stout lady coming in. As she appeared in the boudoir, one of the guests got up, shook hands and left and the young man's eyes fixed on a string of black pearls, followed her dark dress through the other rooms.

When the new arrival had settled down they chattered on, jumping spasmodically from one subject to the other, Morocco, the war in the East, England's African troubles, reciting everything from memory as if they were rehearsing a pleasant society comedy, the lines of which they had gone over again

and again.

They were discussing M Linet's chances of being elected to the Academy. The new-comer fervently hoped he would be beaten by M Cabanon-Lebas, author of the fine version of *Don Quixote* in French verse, for the stage.

"You know it will be played at the Odéon next winter."

"Yes, I know. It will be the literary event of the season. I must go."

Mme Walter took her part with graceful ease, never hesitating, her opinions always ready in advance.

But she saw that it was getting dark and rang for lamps, all the time listening to the endless flow of words babbling on like a brook and thinking of her next dinner party and how she had forgotten to give the order to the printer for the invitations.

She was a trifle too plump, very good looking still, at the dangerous age. She kept her looks by diet, precautions, hygiene and skin foods. She seemed sensible, moderate and reasonable, one of those women whose minds are spread out like a model garden. She never gave one a surprise or did anything unexpected but there was a restful charm about her. She possessed common sense, shrewd discreet reliable and a tranquil good will towards everybody and everything which was her substitute for brilliance, sparkling wit and devotion.

She noticed that Duroy had not spoken, that no one had spoken to him and that he seemed a trifle ill at ease, and as the ladies were still thrashing out the matter of the pending Academy election she asked him: "You ought to know more about this than any of us M Duroy, who is your preference?"

He replied promptly: "In this matter, Madame, I never examine the merits of the candidates, which are always arguable, but their age and their health. I don't bother about whether one of them has made a translation in rhyme but I make inquiries about the state of their liver, their heart, their kidneys and their spinal column. For me a good heart attack, a first class diabetes and especially a promising beginning of locomotor ataxy are a hundred per cent more valuable than forty volumes of partriotic verse in barbaric poetry."

There was a surprised silence and Mme Walter, smiling asked: "Why?"

He said: "I'll tell you. Part of my job is to get copy on what you ladies like. Now, Madame, the Academy only interests you when an Academician dies. The more he dies, the happier you are. So, in order that they may die off quickly they should be elected when they are old and sick." He added, amused at their mute astonishment: "I'm like you myself and I love to read of the death of an Academician. I immediately ask myself: Who will take his place? and I make my little list. It's a game, a jolly little game played at every tea table in Paris the moment one of these immortals dies. I call the game: 'Death and the forty Dotards'."

The ladies were a bit bewildered but they began to smile.

Rising to leave he concluded: "It's you ladies who elect them, and you elect them only in order to see them die off. So choose them old, very old, the oldest you can get, and don't bother about anything else."

Then he left with a certain grace.

As soon as he had gone, one of the ladies declared: "He's a strange fellow, that young man. Who is he?"

Mme Walter answered. "One of our reporters. He's not very high up yet, but I'm certain he'll rise."

Duroy ran down into the street gleefully by great dancing leaps, pleased with his leave taking and saying to himself: "An excellent exit."

That night he made it up with Rachael.

Two notable events marked the following week. He was appointed chief of the reporting staff and received an invitation to dine from Mme Walter. He at once saw the connection between the two events.

La Vie Française was above everything else a capitalist paper, its proprietor being a man of capital who used the press and his membership of the legislature as levers. He made geniality a weapon and manoeuvred under the mark of the bluff honest fellow, but he employed for his various designs only men that he had tried, tested and proved, whom he knew to be wily, bold and resourceful. Duroy, newly appointed

chief reporter, seemed to him the very man he was looking for.

This post had been filled till quite recently by the editorial secretary, an old journalist, a M Boisrenard ; he was correct, punctual and meticulous to a degree. For thirty years he had been editorial secretary to eleven different journals without changing or modifying a single habit. He passed from one editorial sanctum to another, like changing a restaurant, hardly noticing that the food had not quite the same taste. Political and religious views, officially he had none. He did his work like a blind man who sees nothing, a deaf man hearing nothing and a dumb man saying nothing. But he had, nonetheless, an unassailable professional loyalty and would not lend himself to a thing which he did not consider honourable, loyal and correct from a professional point of view.

M Walter who valued him greatly wanted to entrust the Echoes—an uninterpretable word partially explained as 'spreading of rumours' but meaning much more—to another man. It was the holder of this post and those under him who launched out the news, who started those rumours on their rounds which influenced the public and big money. At social society affairs he it was who must introduce, without seeming to, the vital subject, rather insinuating it than saying it outright. It was his job by subtle suggestion to make people think what he wanted them to, to deny by innuendo what rumour was affirming or to affirm what no one, up to then, believed to be true. Everyone of these men had to find every day at least one item of interest to the reading public. He must think of everything for everybody. He must do their thinking for all the professions, for Paris, for the Provinces, the Army, the Artists, the Clergy, the University, the Judiciary, the Prostitutes.

The man who rules and commands a battalion of reporters for a great newspaper must be always awake, on his guard all the time, suspicious, looking ahead, sharp, resourceful, watchful, up to every artifice, with an infallible instinct to detect bogus news at a glance, to judge what can be published and what suppressed, to feel the pulse of the public, and he

must know how to deck out his stories so that their effect is multiplied. M Boisrenard, with all his long experience, had not the gift of leadership; and above all he lacked that native cunning, essential every day for the proprietor's secret propaganda.

Duroy on the other hand fitted in to a job like this perfectly and was the ideal chief reporter for this journal, which—to quote a phrase of Norbert de Varenne's—"sailed upon the sea of State and down the creeks and cross-eddies of Politics."

The inspirers and real reporters of *la Vie Française* were half a dozen members of Parliament, themselves financially interested in the speculations which the Director launched and sustained. They were known in the Chamber as "Walter's Gang" and were much envied there because they had become rich men with him and through him.

Forestier, the political editor, was actually the puppet of these politicians, the instrument of their designs. They whispered to him the subjects for his articles which he always wrote at home, because, as he said, it was more quiet and private there.

To give the journal a literary flavour, two celebrated authors of different types were attached to it, Jacques Rival, the famous columnist, and Norbert de Varenne, renowned poet and whimsical story-teller of the new school. Then there were the critics of Art, Painting, Music, and the theatre and a criminologist, all collected at low salaries from the great mercenary tribe of journalists. Two society women, "Pink Domino" and "Patte Blanche" retailed the world's gossip, specializing in fashion, high life, etiquette and what not, with risqué title-tattle on the indiscretions of great ladies. Thus *la Vie Française* "sailed the Sea of State and down the creeks and cross-eddies of Politics."

Duroy was still overjoyed at his appointment as 'Chief of the Echoes' when he received a little printed card on which he read: "M and Mme Walter request the pleasure of the company of M Georges Duroy at dinner on Thursday 20th January."

This new stroke of luck, coming so soon after the other, filled him with such jubilation that he kissed the invitation card as if it had been a love letter. Then he sought out the cashier to discuss the weighty matter of funds.

A 'Chief of Echoes' usually keeps a budget out of which he pays his reporters for their stories, good or middling, which they bring in one after the other like gardeners taking their produce to a fruiterer's shop. Twelve hundred francs a month were, at the beginning, allotted to Duroy who intended to appropriate a fair portion of it to himself.

The cashier after great pressure had, in the end, advanced him four hundred francs. He intended straight away to repay to Mme de Marelle the two hundred and eighty francs he owed her, but reflecting, very speedily, that this would leave him only a hundred and twenty francs, which would be quite insufficient to enable him to carry on his new job properly, he put off repayment to a future time.

For two days he was busy settling in. He had inherited a table full of pressing correspondence in the immense room reserved for the reporting staff. He presided over one end of this room, with Boisrenard, his hair still coal black in spite of his age, sat bent over his copy at the other.

The long middle table belonged to the reporters flitting in and out. They usually sat on it, playing bilboquet with the sternest concentration, half a dozen of them at a time, like so many Chinese images.

Duroy had himself now taken up the game and had become quite an expert, thanks to the tuition of Saint-Potin.

Forestier, increasingly indisposed, had given him his latest purchase, the mahogany bilboquet, which he found a trifle on the heavy side, and Duroy manipulated with vigorous arm the large black ball at the end of its cord, counting: "One... two... three... four... five... six."

He had managed to score twenty points for the first time on the day that he was to dine at Mme Walter's. "A good omen," he thought, "my luck is in." For skill at bilboquet was no light matter: it conferred a certain precedence in the various departments of *la Vie Française*.

He left early so as to have time to dress and as he was walking along the rue de Londres, he saw a little woman tripping before him looking exactly like Mme de Marelle. He felt the colour mount his cheeks and his heart beating. He crossed the road to look at her from the side. She turned to cross also. He had been mistaken; he breathed again. He often wondered what he was to do when he met her again, face to face. Should he acknowledge or pretend not to have seen her?

"I'll look the other way," he decided.

It was cold and the gutters were frozen over. Pedestrians looked grim and grey in the gaslight.

When the young man got home, he thought: "I shall have to change my diggings. This place won't do for me now." He felt strung up, gay, ready to run along the housetops, and going to his bed by the window he repeated aloud: "It's come at last. My fortune. I must write to father."

He did occasionally write to his father; and his letter always brought a thrill of happiness to the little Normandy wine shop, by the roadside, at the top of the hill looking down on Rouen and the vast valley of the Seine. From time to time also he received a blue envelope with his address painfully traced on it in clumsy trembling writing. His father's letters invariably began with the same lines: "My dear son, I am happy to say that your mother and I are well. There is nothing new in the country. But I may tell you. . . ." And there was still a warm place in his heart for happenings in the village, tidings of the neighbours, news of the crops and the harvests.

Adjusting his white tie before his little mirror he repeated: "Yes I must write to Dad to-morrow. If he could see me this evening in the house I am dining in, wouldn't he be thunder-struck, the dear old fellow?"

And his mind went back suddenly, a little wistfully, to the humble kitchen downstairs, next to the empty coffee room, the shining saucepans throwing their yellow light along the walls, the cat in the fireplace, squatting with its nose to the fire like a Chinese idol, the timeworn wooden table with the soup tureen steaming in the middle of it, and a lighted candle

between two napkins. And he saw the old man and woman, his father and mother, two peasants with their slow heavy rustic movements eating their soup by little sips. He remembered every wrinkle in their old faces, the very movements of their arms and their heads. He even knew what they would be saying to one another evening after evening, face to face, over their frugal meal. He thought again: "Sooner or later, I really must go and see them." And his toilet finished, he blew out the light and went down.

The whole length of the outer boulevard he was accosted by street women. He shook their hands off his arm, answering them, "Be off. Let me alone," with violent contempt as if they were insulting him. What did they take him for? They didn't know how to draw the line between men, these prowlers of the night. The feel of his black coat, the sensation that he was going to dine with wealthy people, very well known, celebrated, important people, obsessed his whole being. He saw himself as a new man, a personality, a man of the world, of the real world, the world that mattered.

Full of assurance he entered the ante-room lighted by two bronze candelabra and handed his coat and walking stick to the valets. All the rooms were illuminated. Mme Walter was receiving in the second and biggest. She welcomed him with a charming smile and he shook hands with two men who had arrived just before him, M Firmin and M Laroche-Mathieu, both members of Parliament and both on the secret staff of *la Vie Française*. M Laroche-Mathieu had a very special position in the journal on account of his great influence in the Chamber. Everyone saw in him a coming cabinet minister.

The Forestiers arrived, the wife very lovely in pink. It amazed Duroy to see her obvious close familiarity with both representatives of their country. She conversed confidentially in lowered tones with M Laroche-Mathieu for some five minutes. Charles looked worn out. He had lost a good deal of weight in the past month and was coughing all the time. "I've made up my mind to spend the rest of the winter in the south," he said.

Norbert de Varenne and Jacques Rival came in together. Then a door opened at the end of the room and M Walter entered between two tall young ladies of sixteen and eighteen, one pretty and the other plain.

Duroy was quite surprised though he knew that his employer was the father of a family. He had never given a thought to the girls except as one thinks of a far off country which one will never see. And he had imagined them as quite small children and here were two young women. He experienced that slight shock which a change of view-point brings with it.

They shook hands with him, prettily, one after the other, as he was introduced and went and sat down at a little table, especially reserved for them. Another guest was expected, and everyone was practically silent with that "before-dinner" constraint customary among people who have little in common, after the various avocations of their day.

Duroy was idly contemplating the walls and M Walter called out to him from some distance, obviously wanting to make him feel at home. "You are looking at my pictures?"—he accented the *my*—"let me show them to you," and he took up a lamp to emphasize the details.

"These are landscapes," he said.

There was one of de Guillemet's vast canvases, a beach scene in Normandy under an orange sky; next to it a forest by Harpiguies, an Algerian plain by Guillemet with a camel on the horizon, an enormous creature with its long thin legs, looking like some strange monument. M Walter passed to another wall, declaiming pompously like a Master of Ceremonies. There were four masterpieces: "A Visit to a Hospital" by Gervex, "A Harvest Woman" by Bastien-Lapage, "A Widow," by Bougereau and "An Execution" by Jean-Paul Laurens.

The last work portrayed a Vendean priest being shot against the wall of his church by a squad of revolutionary troops.

A smile passed over the solemn features of his host when they came to the next panel. "These are my whimsicalities." The first was a little work by Jean Béraud, called "The High and the Low". It showed a pretty Parisienne climbing to the

top of a moving tramcar. Her head was just peeping over the roof and the men on their seats were smiling a pleasant welcome to the fresh young face coming towards them, while those standing on the platform below her were looking up at the young woman's legs with a very different expression of greedy desire.

M Walter was holding his lamp out at arm's length and laughing like a mischievous child: "What d'you think of it? Funny isn't it?"

Then he proclaimed: "'A Rescue'" by Lambert.

In the middle of a dining table a little kitten was squatting, examining with astonishment and perplexity a fly, drowning in a glass of water. She had her tiny paw raised ready to lift the insect out with one quick dab. But she hadn't made up her mind. She was thinking it over. Would she do it?

The Director came to a Detaille: "The Lesson," a soldier in barracks teaching a poodle to play the drum.

Duroy laughed approval with real enjoyment: "How delightful, how very...delight..."

He stopped short. He heard Mme de Marelle's voice, coming in.

M Walter continued exhibiting his treasures and explaining them. He was showing a water colour by Maurice Lalour: "The Obstacle." It was a sedan chair halted in the street by a fight between two working men, powerful fellows, fighting like Hercules, and peering out of the window of the sedan a woman's bewitching face watching the brutal struggle, without impatience, fearlessly, with a kind of longing admiration.

M Walter was saying: "I have many more in the other rooms, but they are not so famous, not classified yet. This is my Academy floor. I buy them when the painters are young, quite young and unknown and I put them in reserve in my private apartments waiting for the moment when the painters become famous." He added softly: "That's the time to buy paintings, when the painters are young. They are famished with hunger then. They haven't a sou, not a soul."

But Duroy saw nothing, listened without taking in a word.

Mme de Marelle was in the room, behind him. What ought he to do? If he greeted her would she not turn her back on him or throw him some insolent contemptuous rejoinder? And if he ignored her what would everyone think? He told himself: "I must gain time." He was so taken aback he had a mind to pretend sudden illness to get away.

The inspection of the pictures was over. The Director had put down his lamp to welcome the last arrival while Duroy began his examination of the masterpieces all over again as if he admired them so much he could not leave them. He was completely nonplussed. What was he to do? He could hear their voices and distinguish their conversation. Mme Forestier was calling him now "Come here a minute, M Duroy." He hurried to her. She wanted to introduce a lady friend who was giving a fête and wanted it mentioned in the 'Echoes' of *la Vie Française*.

"Yes, certainly, Madame, certainly, I'll see to it myself," he heard himself stammering.

Mme de Marelle was quite near him now. He didn't dare turn round. Suddenly he thought he must have gone mad. He heard a high clear voice: "Good evening, Bel-Ami. You don't recognize me these days?"

He turned round like a flash. She was standing before him smiling with her eyes full of fun and affection; and she was holding out her hand.

He took it shakily still afraid of some trick, some spiteful artifice. But she went on serenely: "What's happened to you? We never see you now-a-days."

He still couldn't pull himself together and stammered: "I've had heaps to do Madame, a tremendous lot of work. M Walter has put me on to different duties which have taken up all my time."

She was looking him full in the face, and he could discover nothing in her eyes but easy good fellowship: "I know; but that's no reason for forgetting your friends."

The entrance of a fat lady separated them, an enormous woman, very décolleté, with red arms and red cheeks, overdressed and over-coiffured and walking with such heavy clum-

siness, that, seeing her unwieldy progress, one could almost physically feel the weight of her feet and massive limbs.

But everyone treated her with the utmost deference and Duroy asked Mme Forestier. "Who in the world is that person?"

"The Viscountess de Percemur, who signs herself 'Patte Blanche.'"

He was stupefied, with a violent desire to burst out laughing: "Patte Blanche! That! Patte Blanche! And I've always thought of her as a young woman like you! So that is Patte Blanche! Well! Well! Well! It takes one's breath away!"

A servant appeared in the doorway. "Madame is served."

The dinner was cheerful and trivial, one of those functions, where one talks all the time and says nothing. Duroy found himself between the Director's homely elder daughter and Mme de Marelle. The nearness of the latter irked him a little, although she seemed bright and good humoured and chatted away with her usual liveliness. He was embarrassed at first, constrained, hesitating, at a loss, like a musician who has got out of tune. Little by little his self-possession returned and their eyes continually met, questioning one another, mingling, intimately, almost sensually as of old.

Suddenly he felt something touch his foot under the table. Slowly he advanced his foot and pressed hers. She didn't recoil at the touch. They didn't speak, both being engaged with their neighbours.

Duroy, his heart beating pressed his knee lightly against hers. A soft pressure responded. Then he knew that their love was reborn.

They talked very little. But their lips trembled every time their eyes met. The young man wanted to make himself pleasant to his employer's daughter and addressed a sentence to her from time to time. She answered him just as her mother would have done, correctly, with exact precision, never at a loss for the right word.

On M Walter's right the Viscountess de Percemur was putting on the airs of a Royal Princess; and Duroy, hugely enjoying

himself watching her, lowered his voice to ask Mme de Marelle:
 "Do you know the other one, who signs herself 'Pink Domino'?"

"Yes, very well: The Baroness de Livar."

"Is she of the same brand as this one?"

"No, but she's comic too. A tall cuttle-fish, sixty years old, false hair, false teeth, a Restoration piece, dressed to the period."

"Good heavens! where do they dig out these phenomena of literature?"

"The wreckage of the nobility are always collected by wealthy upstarts."

"No other reason."

"None whatever."

Back in the drawing room Duroy went up to Mme de Marelle again.

"May, I see you home later on?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because M Laroche-Mathieu always takes me home when I dine here. He's my cousin."

"When may I see you?"

"Come and lunch with me to-morrow."

They separated without speaking again.

Duroy found the party boring and didn't stay late. As he was going down the staircase he met Norbert de Varenne, also leaving. There being no rivalry between them in the journal... their work being essentially different, the old poet now-a-days displayed a grandfatherly affection towards the young man.

"Do you mind if I come with you to the end of the street?" said he.

"It's an honour, maestro."

They started, walking slowly down the boulevard Malesherbes.

Paris was almost deserted that night, a cold night, one of those nights—so to say—vaster than others, when the stars are more remote, when the air seems to carry to us in icy whispers something from afar, beyond the planets.

The two men didn't speak at first. Then Duroy, for something to say, suggested. "This M Laroche-Mathieu seems quite a cultured, well informed man."

The old poet murmured: "You think so?"

The younger man was surprised. He hesitated: "Well, yes. Besides he has the reputation of being one of the ablest men in Parliament"

"Very likely. In the kingdom of the blind, a one-eyed man is king. The whole lot of them are third rate because their minds are shut in between two walls—money and graft. They are vulgarians my friend. It's impossible to talk to them about anything we admire. They don't speak the same language. Their brains are at the bottom of a vase or rather pot."

"Ah! It's hard to find one man with real breadth of vision, one who gives us the feeling of those great generous refreshing winds that one breaths in by the sea. I have known a few. They are dead!" Norbert de Varenne spoke in a clear but restrained voice. It would have rung through the silence of the night if he had allowed it free scope. He seemed overwrought and depressed.

He went on: "What does it matter, anyhow—a little genius more or less? It all has to end."

He was silent. Duroy, who was in high spirits himself, rallied him, laughingly. "You are in a black mood to-night, macstro."

The poet answered: "I always am, my son, and so will you be in a few years. Life is a hill. As long as we are climbing we look towards the summit and are happy. But once we have reached it we look down the other side and see suddenly the descent, the end, which is death. We go slowly as we climb, but very quickly as we go down. At your age one is carefree. One hopes for so much, which, of course, never comes. For my part, I no longer expect anything...only death."

Duroy laughed: "The devil! You make me shiver."

"No, you can't understand me to-day, but it'll all come back to you—what I've told you—later on. There will come a day,

mark me, and it will come apace, far too soon, when there is an end to laughter, the day when you realize that behind everything you do and think and plan is—death.

“ Oh ! you ! you don't even understand the word, death. At your age it signifies nothing. At mine it is ghastly.

“ Yes, one understands it, quite suddenly, one knows not how or why and then everything in life takes on a different aspect. In my own case for the past fifteen years I have had a feeling tearing at me, as if I had a gnawing animal inside my body. I have felt it little by little, month by month, hour by hour, destroying me like a crumbling house. It has distorted me so completely that I no longer recognize myself. Nothing now remains of me, of me the radiant man, glowing and fresh that I was at thirty. I have seen my black hair turn white and with what masterly devilish slowness! It has taken away my firm skin, my muscles, my teeth, my whole former body, leaving me only a mind in despair and soon it will take that as well.

“ Yes, it has destroyed me, the fiend; softly, inexorably it has accomplished the long destruction of my being, second by second. Every step I take brings it nearer to me, every movement, every breath hastens the hateful work. To breathe, to sleep, to drink, to eat, to work, to dream, everything we do, is to die. In fact to live is to die.

“ Oh, you doubt me, do you? Think it over just for a quarter of an hour and you will see.

“ What is your ambition? Love? In a few years you will be impotent. And then what? Money? What will you do with it? Pay for women? When you are yourself useless? Overeat and become fat and groan the long nights through under the throes of gout?

“ What else is there? Fame, honour, glory? What is the use of any of them when you can no longer reap their reward in the shape of love? Love, wealth, fame!

“ And then after it all? Always death to end it.

“ I, now, I see it so close that I often want to stretch out my arms and push it off. It covers the earth and fills space. I discover it everywhere. Every little animal crushed on the

road. every leaf that falls, every grey hair appearing, tears my heart and tells me: 'There it is, look.' "

He went on slowly, a little breathless, raising his voice, oblivious of anyone who might hear him.

"And never does a single one of us return, never. We preserve the moulds of statues, the types which turn out again and again the same things, but my body, my face, my thoughts, my desires will never appear again, never. And all the time millions, billions of beings will come into existence; they will have height, eyes, foreheads, cheeks, mouths, as I have, but never can I appear again, never a single part of me can be seen again in all these countless multitudes so different and yet so alike.

"To what can we cling? To whom send out our cry of despair. In what can we believe?

"All religions are folly with their childish morals and their selfish, futile, ridiculous promises.

"Death alone is certain."

He stopped, took Duroy by the lapels of his coat and said slowly: "Think of all that young man, during the days and months and years and your outlook on life will be different. Try to free yourself from all that hems you in, make that superhuman effort to live above your body, your thoughts, your interests, the whole human tribe and you will understand what very little importance there is in lover's quarrels, in science, in the debate on the budget, in everything."

He started walking rapidly.

"But also, you will feel the frightful agony of despair. You will writhe and struggle, lost, drowned in doubts and fears. You will cry 'help me' to the wide world and no one will answer. You will hold out your arms calling to be rescued, loved, consoled, saved and no one will come.

"Why must we suffer thus? There is no doubt that we were born that we might live more according to the substance than the spirit; but, because we have the power to reason there is this disparity between our exalted intelligence and the immutable conditions of our life.

"Consider the lower orders, humdrum clods: they can

sustain the greatest disasters unperturbed. Animals don't feel them at all."

He stopped short, reflected a second or two, then said with a weary resigned air: "I myself am a lost being. I have neither father, mother, brother, sister, wife, children, nor God."

He added after a pause, "I have only poetry."

Then, lifting his head towards the heavens where shone the pale face of the full moon he declaimed:

"Mid low'ring skies I search the clue in vain,
Where reigns a ghastly moon in her domain."

They reached the pont de la Concorde. He went on: "Marry, my friend. You don't know what it is to live alone at my age. Solitude to-day fills me with fearful depression; solitude in the house, by the fire in the evening. It seems to me then that I am alone on the earth, frightfully alone, yet in the midst of vague dangers, of unknown and terrible perils; and the partition which shuts me off from my neighbour whom I do not know, puts him as far away from me as the clouds seen from my window. A kind of fever grips me, a fever of grief and terror and the silence of the four walls stifles me. It is such a deep sad silence, the silence of one living alone. A silence that enfolds not only the body but the mind, and when a chair creaks, one's heart jumps for every sound is magnified in the mournful dreary place."

He fell silent again, then added wistfully: "When one is old, children would be a comfort."

They were in the middle of the rue de Bourgogne. The poet stopped before a tall mansion, rang the bell, and held out his hand: "Forget an old man's rambling and live according to your age, young man; good-bye."

And he disappeared in the dark passage.

Duroy went on his way, much moved. It seemed as if he had been made to peer down into some deep cavity full of dead bodies into which he must fall himself some day.

But stopping to give passage to a perfumed lady alighting from a carriage to go into her house he breathed in eagerly the lavender scent. His heart beat briskly with hope and

happiness; and the remembrance of Mme de Marelle whom he would see again on the morrow took possession of him from head to foot.

Everything was smiling on him, life was full of tenderness. How good it was,—hopes realized, desires gratified.

He fell asleep with a light heart and rose early to take a stroll down the Bois-de-Boulogne, before keeping his appointment.

The wind had changed in the night and it was milder, warmer under the April sun. All the habitués of the Bois were out that morning, answering the call of the bright clear sky.

Duroy walked slowly, drinking in the refreshing air, fragrant with the breath of spring. He passed the Arc de Triomphe and stopped in the Grand Avenue on the side opposite the riders. He watched them trotting or galloping, men and women, select, exclusive, wealthy, with scarcely a touch of envy. He knew nearly everyone of them by name, possessed exact details of their fortunes and of the secret history of their lives for it was part of his job to keep a sort of catalogue of celebrities and the scandals linked up with them.

The ladies passed, slim and slender in their close-fitting black habits with that touch of aloofness and inaccessibility inseparable from women on horseback; and Duroy amused himself by softly intoning, as one does the litany in Church, the names, titles, and attributes of the various lovers that rumour assigned to them.

“Baron de Tanquetet
Prince de la Tour-Enguerrand.”

and occasionally this liturgy became Lesbian

“Louise Michot of the Vaudeville,
Rose Marquetin of the Opera.”

This game greatly amused him. It was, as if he were laying bare the eternal and profound infamy of the human race and of its pleasures, lusts and consolations, underneath this austere, remote exterior.

He said aloud: “A gang of hypocrites;” and transferred his attention to the men to whom rumour assigned the most un-

savoury reputations. He saw quite a number suspected of card sharpening, elegant aristocrats, who, at the best earned their living at card tables and had no other source of livelihood. Others, owning historic celebrated names, lived solely on the incomes of their wives; others, men of high rank too, were, so rumour said, kept by their mistresses. He saw wealthy financiers, received in the most exclusive circles, whose fortunes originated in barefaced robbery. He saw statesmen too, so respected that the little tradesmen in the street bared their heads to them as they passed, whose shameless juggling in the finances of great national concerns, were no secret to those, like himself, in the know.

Everyone of them without exception, had a haughty carriage, a supercilious expression and an insolent eye.

Duroy was vastly amused, repeating: "A set of crooks and sharks."

A low open carriage passed, drawn at a fast trot by two white thoroughbreds, their manes tossing in the breeze and driven by a young dainty little blonde with two grooms seated behind her. She was a notorious courtesan. Duroy halted. He would have liked to salute and applaud the pretty upstart of love who, on this promenade, at the exact hour when it was reserved for aristocratic hypocrites, had the pluck to flaunt the luxury she earned between her sheets.

He had a vague feeling that there was something in common between him and her, that they were like souls with like motives and that his own success would be followed by similar audacious exploits.

He left the Bois and half an hour later, his heart glowing with anticipation knocked at his late mistress's door.

She gave him her lips, as if there had been no rupture between them, even forgetting for a little while the shrewd caution which forbade any endearments in her house. Then she said: "You don't know how annoyed I am my dear. I was so looking forward to a honeymoon with you and now my husband has descended on me for six whole weeks. He's taken leave. But I can't go six weeks without seeing you, especially after our little misunderstanding, so this is how

I have arranged things. You must come and dine with us on Monday. I've already spoken to him about you. I will introduce you to him."

Duroy hesitated, rather worried. He had never before had the experience of being introduced to a man whose wife he was seducing. He was afraid that something would give him away, some trace of awkwardness, a look, a word, anything. He spluttered, "No...I...I hardly like... to...to meet your husband."

She was quite astonished, looking at him naïvely with eyes wide open. "But why? How absurd of you. It happens every day. I had no idea you were such a simple Simon."

This pricked his conceit: "All right. I'll come on Monday."

She added: "To make it look quite ordinary I'll ask the Forestiers; though it bores me to entertain people in the house."

Till the Monday, Duroy hardly gave a thought to the coming introduction; but as he climbed Mme de Marelle's staircase he felt curiously uneasy, not because he had any qualms about taking her husband's hand, or drinking his wine or eating his bread, but because he was afraid of something, he did not know what.

He was ushered into the drawing room as usual and waited. Then the door opened and he saw a tall grey-bearded gentleman, punctilious, correct, and wearing the ribbon of the Legion of Honour, who greeted him with studied courtesy: "My wife has often spoken to me of you, Monsieur, and I am very pleased to make your acquaintance."

Duroy came forward trying to put on an expression of genial cordiality and shook hands with his host with overdone vigour. Then, seated, he couldn't find a word to say.

M de Marelle, putting a log of wood on the fire, asked him whether he had been long in journalism.

Duroy replied: "Only a few months."

"Ah, you have got on quickly."

"Yes, fairly quickly," and he started talking at random, not thinking of what he was saying, about all the banal trivialities customary between men who do not know one another.

His self-possession came back and he began to find the situation amusing. He looked at M de Marelle, serious, distinguished, impeccable, reserved, and wanted to burst out laughing. He thought, "Yes, I've had your wife, old fellow, I've had your wife." And an intimate vicious satisfaction filled him, the glee of the successful thief whom no one suspects, a crafty delicious mean pleasure. Suddenly he wanted to be this man's friend, to gain his trust, to induce him to confide to him the secret things of his life.

Mme de Marelle came in abruptly. A smiling impenetrable glance hovered over them both for a second, then she greeted Duroy. Before her husband he did not dare kiss her hand, as usual.

She was natural and pleasant like a person used to this sort of thing, who looks upon such a meeting with its essential vicious cunning, as something quite normal and simple. Laurine entered and held her face up to Georges less demonstratively than of old, as if her father's presence made her nervous. Her mother said to her: "You mustn't call him Bel-Ami to-day," and the child blushed, as if something seriously indiscreet had been said, exposing an intimate and rather guilty secret of her heart.

When the Forestiers arrived, both host and hostess were dismayed at the alteration in Charles. He had lost weight and colour terribly in one week and his cough racked him incessantly. He stated that they were leaving for Cannes the following Thursday under his doctor's orders.

They left early and Duroy said: "I'm afraid his life hangs on a thin thread. He'll never make old bones."

Mme de Marelle agreed unconcernedly: "Oh, he's done for! He's a precious lucky fellow to have found a wife like his."

Duroy asked: "Does she help him much?"

"Help him much! Why, she does everything. She is in the know about everything that goes on, she knows everyone, seeming to see no one. She gets what she wants, how she wants, when she wants. She can pull strings anywhere. I tell you, she's a marvel! And what a treasure for a man who wants to make his way in the world!"

Georges suggested: "If anything happened to him I suppose she'd marry again?"

Mme de Marelle replied: "Yes, I wouldn't be surprised if she had someone in view now...a Deputy...at least, well...he might not be willing...for...for...perhaps there would be heavy obstacles...moral ones I mean...Anyhow there you are. I don't know anything."

M de Marelle rebuked her with slow impatience. "You are far too fond of suspecting things about other people. I don't like to see it. We are not concerned with other people's business. Our own conscience should govern us. That ought to be made a rule for everyone."

Duroy left, worried and full of vague fears.

The following day he called on the Forestiers and found them packing their luggage. Charles was stretched out on a sofa and magnified his difficulty in breathing: "I shall have to be away at least a month," he said, then he gave Duroy a series of instructions for the paper, though everything had been gone into and arranged with M Walter.

When Georges left he gripped his old comrade's hand firmly: "Well! So long old chap." But as Mme Forestier saw him out he asked her eagerly: "You haven't forgotten our pact. We are friends and allies, are we not? So if you need me in any way whatever don't hesitate. A telegram or a letter and I shall obey."

She murmured: "Thanks. I won't forget." And her eyes said "Thanks" too with deeper, softer, meaning.

As Duroy went down the staircase he met M de Vaudrec climbing slowly up. The count looked depressed. Was it at this leave-taking? Anxious to show himself a man of breeding Duroy gave him a flamboyant greeting.

The count returned it courteously, but a trifle haughtily.

The Forestiers left the following Thursday.

CHAPTER VII

CHARLES'S departure invested Duroy with higher status in *la Vie Française*; he put his name below several articles now, as well as signing the 'Echoes', for it was the Director's policy for every contributor to take the responsibility for his own copy. He wrote some spirited controversial articles and his constant association with statesmen and politicians was preparing the ground for him to become, in time, a skilful and resourceful political editor.

He could see only one cloud on his horizon. This came from a little critical journal called *La Plume*. It attacked him constantly or rather attacked in him, the chief of the 'Echoes', the chief of 'Walter's Rumour mongers', as the anonymous scribe dubbed them. There was a daily outpouring of sarcastic hints, innuendoes and gibes.

Jacques Rival, one day, said to Duroy: "You are very patient."

The other stammered: "What can I do? They never attack me directly."

Then, one afternoon, as he came into the editorial room, Boisrenard handed him the day's issue of *La Plume*.

"I say, there's a nasty comment in this, for you."

"Ah! What about?"

"Nothing at all really, the arrest of some old woman named Aubert by a vice-suppression officer."

Georges took the paper and read under the title *Duroy amuses himself*: "The illustrious reporter of *la Vie Française* took us to task yesterday for stating that an old woman named Aubert had been arrested by an agent of the notorious black-mailing 'vice-suppression' squad. He says mother Aubert exists only in our imagination. Well, we now notify him that the old woman in question lives at No. 18, rue de l'Écureuil in Montmartre. We understand only too well what motives actuate these agents of Walter's Bank in supporting those of the Commissioner of Police who turns a blind eye on their

racket. As for the reporter in question, he would do better in future to confine himself to the retailing of the marvellous tall stories to which he holds the key: stories of deaths denied the next day, of battles which have never been fought, of grave political pronouncements by monarchs who have not spoken a word, all the tortuous shady 'information' issued to enhance the 'Walter Profits'; or better still let him stick to his money-making reports of receptions given by would-be society women, or his recommendations of certain products, which are such a fat source of revenue to him and his underlings."

The young man was, at first, more puzzled than angry.

Boisrenard went on: "Who gave us this 'echo'?"

Duroy searched his memory and was at a loss. Then suddenly it came back to him.

"Ah, yes, it was Saint-Potin," and he flushed hotly disgusted at the accusation of bribe-taking.

He cried: "Why they pretend that I'm paid to...that I accept money...."

Boisrenard cut in: "Certainly they do, in so many words. This is awkward for you. The proprietor is pretty strong on this subject. It's happening so often in the 'echoes'."

Saint-Potin came in and Duroy rapped at him: "Have you seen the note in *La Plume*?"

"Yes, I've just left mother Aubert's place. It is true there is such an old woman but she has not been arrested. The report had no foundation whatever."

Duroy hurried off to the proprietor's house. M. Walter's manner was rather constrained and not unmixed with suspicion. After listening to the facts he said: "Go straight-away to the woman's house. Then issue a denial in such a form that they won't dare attack you in that way again. Far more than Caesar's wife, a journalist must be above suspicion...."

Duroy hailed a cab and, with Saint-Potin as his guide, told the coachman to drive to 18, rue de l'Écureuil, in Montmartre.

It was a vast six-storied mansion. An old woman in a woollen jacket opened the door to them, after they had climbed to the top floor.

"What can I do for you?" she said, addressing Saint-Potin. He replied: "This gentleman is a police inspector and he wants to have a talk with you."

She let them come in. "What is all this fuss about? A couple of days ago, a newspaper reporter came badgering me, I can't think why." Then turning to Duroy she asked him what he wanted to know.

"Is it true that you were arrested by an officer of the 'vice-suppression squad'?"

Her arms went aloft. "Never in my life, sir, never in my life. I'll tell you the whole thing. I have a butcher. He sells good meat but gives bad weight. I have seen him often up to his tricks but have kept quiet. That day I ordered two pounds of cutlets for my daughter and my son-in-law and I saw him throwing in some odd waste bones, cutlet bones yes but not mine. I could have made a ragout out of the lot, but when I order cutlets, I expect cutlets and not other people's waste bones. So I refused to take them. He called me a grey old rat and I called him a dirty old cheat. One word led to another and soon there was a crowd outside the shop, over a hundred of them, laughing their sides out. Then a policeman turned up and took us both off to the Commissioner. He let us go and sent us back, side by side, quite friends again. But I've hardly dared show my nose outside the door since, I'm so ashamed of it."

Duroy asked: "Is that all?"

"That's the whole story sir."

Going back to the office Duroy dictated his rejoinder.

"An anonymous scribbler in *La Plume* has tried to involve me in the matter of an old woman, who he alleges was arrested by the vice-suppression squad, which I deny. I have myself seen mother Aubert who is seventy years old at least and she has given me the facts about the whole silly business which was a trifling squabble with her butcher about the weight of some cutlets which necessitated an explanation before the Commissioner of Police. Such are the facts! As for the other insinuations of the *Plume's* reporter I treat them with contempt. They are the sort of thing one does not trouble to answer,

especially when their author has not the courage to sign his name to them.

“Georges Duroy.”

Duroy went home rather worried in mind. “What was the other man going to reply? Who was he? What was behind this violent attack?” He slept badly.

His note had been approved both by M Walter and Jacques Rival but when he read it in print the next day, it seemed far more truculent and aggressive than in manuscript form and he wished he had made it more conciliatory.

It was on his mind all day, and again he slept badly. He was up with the sun to buy the day's issue of *La Plume*. The papers had not arrived at the news shops and Duroy's mind went back to the day of his first article. ‘The Reminiscences of a Chasseur d’Afrique.’ At last the papers came, and the shopwoman handed him an open copy of *La Plume*.

He gave a lightning glance over the contents and saw nothing about himself. He was breathing more freely when his eye caught the paragraph.

“The omnipotent M Duroy of *la Vie Française* has given us the lie; and in doing so, he lies himself. He admits now the existence of the woman Aubert and that a policeman took her before the Commissioner. It only remains for him to add the words, ‘attached to the vice-suppression squad,’ to the word ‘policeman,’ to dispose of the matter. But the conscience of certain journalists is on a level with their brains.

“And I sign myself,

“Louis Langremont.”

Georges' heart thumped violently on his way home and he dressed for the day hardly knowing what he was doing. He had been deliberately insulted and in such a way as made no hesitation possible. Why? For no reason at all. All on account of a silly prattling old woman and her ridiculous dispute with her butcher.

But there was no doubt that it had now become a very serious matter, and dressing quickly he sought out M Walter at his

house though it was barely eight o'clock in the morning.

M Walter was already up. He read the passage through. "Well," he said, gravely, "You can't climb down now."

The young man made no reply and the Director went on: "You'd better go at once and put yourself in Rival's hands."

Duroy muttered some reply and hurried off to the columnist's house. He was still asleep, but jumped out of bed at the sound of the bell. He perused the article: "Of course, you're bound to call him out. You'll want two seconds. Who's to be the other one."

"I haven't the least idea."

"Boisrenard? How will he do?"

"All right! Boisrenard."

"Are you a skilled fencer?"

"No good at all."

"Hell! What about the pistols?"

"Not too bad."

"Good; you'd better put some practice in, while I attend to the job. Wait a bit."

He went into his dressing room and came back presently, washed, shaved, punctiliously dressed.

"Come with me," he said.

He occupied the whole ground floor of a small hotel, and he took Duroy down to the basement, an enormous place which he had converted into a fencing and shooting hall. All openings on to the street were bricked up.

Lighting a row of gas jets leading to the end of another vault where he had fixed up the steel figure of a man painted in red and blue, he placed on the table two pairs of pistols of the very latest design and began to bark out quick commands as if they were on parade.

"Ready?...Fire! One, two, three."

Duroy, a mere automaton now, obeyed, lifting his arm, taking aim, and firing. As a boy he had often practised bird shooting with an old horse-pistol of his father's, so he hit the dummy full in the chest again and again. Jacques Rival was quite pleased: "Good...first rate...excellent...you'll do...you'll be all right."

Then he left: "Go on practising till mid-day. Here's your ammunition and don't be afraid to blast the whole lot of it off. I'll come back and take you out to lunch and give you the news." And off he went with great cheerfulness. Left alone, Duroy fired off a few shots and then sat down to think things over. "How puerile all this was! What was it going to prove? Is a knave, any the less a knave after he has been chastised? When an honest man has been insulted what does he gain by risking his life against his defamer?" And his mind, groping in the dark, recalled what Norbert de Varenne had said about the essential mean littleness of men, the squalid mediocrity of their ideas and thoughts, the tawdry paltriness of their outlook.

And he spoke his thoughts aloud: "He was right, by God!"

He felt thirsty and hearing the sound of dripping water behind him, saw a shower bath and took a drink from it. Then he started thinking again. It was gloomy, this cellar, like being shut up in a tomb. The slow far off rumbling of vehicles sounded like the roll of distant thunder. What time was it? The hours passed below there as they must to those in prisons, nothing to mark them, nothing to look forward to except the jailer bringing a meal.

He waited wearily.

Suddenly he heard footsteps and voices. Jacques Rival appeared with Boisrenard. He proclaimed: "Everything's settled."

Duroy heaved a sigh of relief. It was all over—an apology. His heart leaped. "Ah!" he stammered. "Thanks."

"Yes," resumed the columnist, "this fellow Langremont is very amenable. He accepted all our conditions. Twenty-five paces, one shot at word of command, pistol raised. It's much better that way than with the aim lowered. Much surer aim: I'll show you. Just watch."

And selecting one of the pistols he gave a practical demonstration on the dummy to prove his theory that one could kill with much more sureness with the arm raised than firing from the hip.

"Now for some lunch," he said. "It's past mid-day?"

They went to a near-by restaurant. Duroy hardly spoke at all. He ate because he didn't want to appear afraid, then he accompanied Boisrenard to the office and carried on with his work. He did it mechanically, his mind far away; but everyone thought him remarkably unconcerned. Towards the middle of the afternoon Jacques Rival came to see him. It was arranged that the seconds should call for him the following morning with a carriage at seven o'clock and take him to Vaset forest, the place for the encounter.

All this was blithely arranged, without his taking the least part in it, without a word from him, without any consultation with him as to whether he approved or disapproved and at such break-neck speed that he was stunned, bewildered, not taking in anything that was going on.

He got home at about nine o'clock that evening having dined with Boisrenard who had loyally stuck to his side all day.

Alone, he walked with quick sharp steps up and down his room. He was too worried to think. One sole idea engrossed his mind: a duel to-morrow, without the idea rousing in him anything but a confused though powerful emotion. He had been a soldier, he had fired upon Arabs without any great danger to himself, much as one fires on the wild boar in the hunt. Summing it up, he had done what he had been made to do. He had shown himself as being what he had to be. And everyone approved of it, was happy about it, thought it excellent. He growled out, as one does in the great crises of the mind: "What a swine the fellow is!" He sat down and began to reflect. He had thrown a visiting card on the little table, that of his adversary, secured by Rival to verify his address. He read it again, for the twentieth time during the day: Louis Langremont, 176, rue Montmartre? Nothing else.

He scrutinized the letters which appeared to him mysterious, full of ominous import—"Louis Langremont." Who was this man? What was his age? His figure? What did he look like? How disgusting, how revolting it was that a stranger, a man completely unknown to him should be actually threatening his life, quite suddenly, with no reason for it, for a mere whim, on account of a silly old woman who had had a row with

her butcher.

Once more he growled angrily, "What a swine!"

He sat silent, pondering, his eyes fixed on the card all the time. Anger began to mount within him against the cardboard slip, a spiteful wrath mixed with a curious uneasiness. He took up a pair of scissors and poked a hole in the middle of the printed name, viciously, as if he was stabbing someone.

So he was going to fight a duel with pistols. Why in the world hadn't he chosen the sword? He would have got off with a prick in the arm or the hand, but with a pistol anything might happen.

He said: "This won't do, I must pull myself together."

The sound of his voice startled him and he looked behind him. He began to feel very nervous. He drank a glass of water and went to bed. Once there, he blew out his light and closed his eyes. It was very warm under the blankets though bitterly cold in the room, but he couldn't get to sleep, tossing and turning in vain. He became thirsty again,—got up to drink. An unpleasant question assailed him. "Am I afraid?" Why did his heart beat unsteadily, at every unaccustomed sound in the room? Why when the clock was about to strike did its preliminary whirr give him a start? and for some seconds why did he have to open his mouth to breathe so great was his oppression?

He tried to reason it out philosophically, "Am I afraid?"

No it couldn't be fear, since he was firmly resolved to see the thing through, he had willingly agreed to the duel without shrinking. Yet he felt so profoundly uneasy that he asked himself: "Am I afraid without knowing it?" And this doubt, this uneasiness, this dismay took possession of him. If a force more powerful, more dominating, more irresistible than his own will governed him what was to become of him? Yes, what was to become of him?

Doubtless he would show up at the rendezvous because he wanted to. But what if he trembled? What if he fainted? And he brooded on that possibility on his reputation, his future.

An odd wish to see his face in the mirror took him. He lighted his lamp again. Seeing his face reflected, he hardly recog-

nized it, it almost seemed that of a stranger; his eyes looked enormous, and he was ghastly pale.

Quite suddenly an idea struck him like a blow. "To-morrow at this time, I may be dead," and his heart beat furiously.

Turning towards his bed he saw himself distinctly lying on his back in the same clothes that he had just taken off. His face had that hollow look, his hands, never to move again, that waxy pallor of a corpse. He was afraid of it, that thing on the bed, and so as not to see it he opened the window and looked out. An icy chill gripped him from head to foot and he drew back shivering.

And all the time he ceaselessly asked himself, "What am I to do? What is to become of me?"

He started to walk up and down mechanically repeating: "Pull yourself together. Pull yourself together."

Then he said: "I must write to the old people in case of..."

He sat down and taking a sheet of note paper wrote: "My Dear Dad and Mums." This he thought too informal in such tragic circumstances and started again: "My dear father, my dear mother: I am fighting a duel to-morrow and it may be..." He dared not write any more and sighed heavily. Another thought worried him now. He had to fight this duel now. There was no getting out of it. Then what was the matter with him? He wanted to fight; was definitely and firmly resolved to; yet it seemed to him that in spite of every effort of his will he would not have even the physical strength needed to get to the meeting place.

Now and again his teeth chattered with a little sharp rattling noise and he asked himself: "Has this fellow fought other duels? Is he an expert shot? Is he a well-known duellist? Is he classified?" He had never even heard of the man before. But surely unless he was a noteworthy shot he would never have agreed as he had done without hesitation or discussion to the pistol as a weapon. Then he pictured the duel itself, his own attitude, the bearing of his enemy and suddenly saw pointing straight at his face a little round black barrel.

He was pretty nearly at a crisis of despair when he noticed a glass on the mantel-shelf. It reminded him that he had a

pint of brandy hardly touched in his cupboard. He grabbed the bottle and drank the fiery spirit neat in great eager gulps. When he put it down a third of it was gone. The effect was instantaneous. A glow like a flame burned him through and through, braced his whole body, steadied his mind.

He said: "I've got a hold on myself now," and opened the window.

Day was dawning, calm and cold. Above, the stars seemed to be dying in the brightening heavens, and on the railway line the green, red and white signals gleamed pale and wan. The first engines were coming out seeking their first trains with shrieking whistles.

Duroy thought: "Perhaps this is my last glimpse of all that," and then reacted violently: "I won't think of a thing till the actual time of the duel. It's the only way to keep one's head."

He began to dress. He had but one more moment of weakness, as he was shaving he thought that this might be the last time he would look upon his own face.

He drank another draught of brandy and finished dressing.

The next hour was a trying period. He walked up and down forcing his mind under control. There was a thunderous knock on the door, so violent that he nearly fell down with the shock of it. His seconds,—Already! They were wrapped in furs. Rival declared: "It's as cold as Siberia." Then he asked: "Everything all right?"

"Yes, quite all right."

"You're steady?"

"Steady as a rock."

"Good. Let's be off. Have you had anything to eat and drink?"

"Yes. I don't need anything."

Boisrenard had donned for the occasion a green and yellow foreign decoration which Duroy had never seen him wear before.

They went downstairs. A gentleman was waiting in the carriage. Rival introduced him: 'Doctor Le Brument.' Duroy shook hands with him thanking him for his presence, then

made for the back seat and sat down on something hard which made him bound up again as if released by a spring. It was a case of pistols.

Rival objected: "No, the front seat, the principal and the doctor, must sit in the front seat." Duroy slowly grasped the formality and subsided by the Doctor's side.

The case of pistol got on Duroy's nerves. He didn't want to look at it. First he tried putting it behind his seat; it irked his back. Then he put it between Rival and Boisrenard; it fell off the seat; finally he pushed it under their feet.

Conversation died down, and although the Doctor retailed an anecdote or two only Rival answered him. Duroy would have liked to join in, if only to prove his own imperturbability but he was afraid of losing the thread of his discourse, of giving away his worried state, and he was haunted by a torturing dread that he might begin to tremble.

The landau was soon in open country. It was now about nine, and one of those rough winter mornings when Nature is bright, brittle and hard as crystal. The trees were white with frost: the earth sounded under the feet, the dry air carried the least noise from afar; the blue sky shining like a mirror and the sun passing, brilliant and cold through space, cast upon frozen creation rays which gave no warmth.

Rival said: "I got the pistol from Gastine-Renette. He loaded them himself. The case is sealed. We shall draw lots whether they are used or the other side's."

Duroy mumbled mechanically: "Thank you."

Then Rival gave him the most minute instructions, determined that his principal should make no mistake. He rubbed on each point several times. "When you are asked, 'Are you ready gentleman?' You reply in a loud voice: 'Yes.'"

"At the word 'Fire' you will sharply raise your arm and fire before the count of three is completed."

Duroy mentally repeated: "At the word 'Fire' I shall raise my arm", "At the word 'Fire' I shall raise my arm", he went over the words again and again like a child saying its lessons.

The carriage entered a wood, turned down an avenue to the

right and then to the right again. Rival abruptly opened the door and called to the coachman: "There, by that little path." And the carriage pushed its way along a little track between two thickets, covered with ice-covered dead leaves.

Duroy kept on muttering to himself: "At the word 'Fire' I shall raise my arm..." and thinking how a carriage accident would settle everything. If only it would overturn, what luck! If I could only break a limb!"

But at the end of a clearing he saw another carriage and four gentlemen stamping about to keep their feet warm; and he had to open his mouth, his breathing had become so painful.

The seconds alighted first, followed by the Doctor and himself. Rival after taking possession of the case of pistols, walked across with Boisrenard towards two strangers who advanced to meet him. Duroy saw them salute ceremoniously, then proceed together into the glade peering about sometimes on the ground and sometimes in the trees, as if they were searching for something that had fallen down and then flown away. Then they measured out the paces and with considerable trouble forced two walking sticks into the frozen earth.

Doctor Le Brument asked Duroy:

"Do you feel quite well? Do you want anything?"

"Nothing, thanks."

It seemed to him that he must be mad, or asleep and dreaming, that something supernatural had come upon him and taken possession of him.

Was he afraid? Perhaps. He didn't know. All he knew was, he was in a maze.

Jacques Rival came to him and announced with satisfaction.

"Everything's ready. Our luck is in. We get the choice of pistols"—a matter of the utmost indifference to Duroy.

They relieved him of his overcoat. He submitted. They went through his pockets to see that he was carrying no papers or portfolio to protect his body.

All the time he kept repeating to himself like a prayer: "At the word 'Fire' I shall raise my arm..."

They took him up to one of the canes stuck in the ground and handed him a pistol. Then he perceived a man, standing

facing him, quite near, a short, podgy bald little man wearing spectacles and quite ready. It was his adversary.

He could see him perfectly clearly but his one solitary thought was: "At the word 'Fire' I shall raise my arm and fire." A voice sounded through the deep silence of the glade, a voice which seemed to come from far away, and it demanded: "Are you ready, gentlemen?"

Georges shouted: "Yes."

Then the same voice ordained: "Fire."

He heard nothing more, he perceived nothing, he took note of nothing but he felt himself raise his arm and press with all his strength on the trigger. Not a sound did he hear!

But he saw instantly a tiny cloud of smoke coming from the barrel of his pistol, and as the man opposite still stood facing him in the same position he noticed another little white cloud spreading itself below his adversary's head. They had both fired. It was over.

His seconds and the doctor examined him, running their hands over him, touching his clothes asking him anxiously: "You are not wounded?"

"No! I don't think so."

Langremont was also unhurt and Jacques Rival grumbled peevishly: "With a cursed pistol it's always the same. Either one gets off without a scratch or is killed outright. What a rotten weapon!"

Duroy remained motionless, numb with surprise and joy. "It was all over." They had to take his pistol away from him, he was keeping it gripped in his hand. He felt now that he could have challenged and fought the whole world. What luck!

All the four seconds were conversing now, making an appointment to write down their depositions later in the day; and the coachman, chuckling on his box, whipped up his horses and they clattered off. All four of them lunched together on the boulevard to discuss the event. Duroy gave them his impressions.

"It didn't affect me at all, not in the least. You must have seen that for yourselves?"

Rival replied: "Yes, you took it exceptionally coolly."

When the written summary was finished, they gave it to Duroy who was going to publish it in the 'Echoes'. He was astonished to note that he had exchanged two shots with M Louis Langremont, and a trifle uneasy he spoke to Rival about it:

"But we only fired one shot."

The other smiled: "Yes, one shot...one shot each...that makes two shots."

And Duroy, satisfied with the explanation, let it go at that.

Daddy Walter embraced him: "Bravo, bravo, you have defended the flag of *la Vie Française*, bravo!"

That evening Georges showed himself in the principal newspaper offices and in all the leading cafés of the boulevard. Twice he ran into his adversary, doing the same thing. They ignored each other. If either had been wounded they would have shaken hands. Each one of them swore with the utmost conviction that he had heard the other's bullet whizz past his head.

The next day towards eleven in the morning Duroy received a 'little blue.' "My god, what a fright I've had. Come at once rue de Constantinople that I may kiss you my love. How brave you are. I adore you.—Clo."

He kept the appointment, and she threw herself into his arms, covering him with kisses.

"Oh! my dearest, if you could know how I felt when I saw it in the paper this morning. Tell me. Tell me everything. I must know."

He told her the details minutely. She asked.

"What a terrible night you must have passed before the duel!"

"No, not at all. I slept quite well."

"I would not have closed an eyelid. And at the place itself? Tell me how everything passed off there."

He gave a dramatic version: "When we were face to face, at twenty paces, hardly four times the length of this little room, Jacques after asking if we were both ready gave the command 'Fire'. I raised my arm immediately and aimed

straight as a die, but I made the mistake of aiming at his head which he moved. I am an expert pistol shot, but, I'm used to a smoother working one, requiring less pressure on the trigger. I must have missed him by a hair's breadth. He's a good shot too, the rascal. His bullet nearly grazed my temple. I felt the breeze of it going by my head."

She was on her knees holding him in her arms as if to share his peril. She kept murmuring: "Oh! my poor darling, my poor darling..." When he had finished his account she said: "I feel I can't keep away from you. However awkward it may be with my husband in Paris I must see you. Often I have an hour in the morning before you are up and I could pop in and kiss you good morning but I'll never set foot in that frightful den of yours again. What can we do?"

"How much are you paying for this place?"

"A hundred francs a month!"

"All right, I'll take it over on my own and move in straight away. I can't live where I am now, in my new position."

She thought the suggestion over, then replied:

"No. I'm not willing."

He was astonished.

"Why in the world not?"

"No particular reason. This flat suits me very well. I'll keep it on."

He laughed: "But, it's in my name anyway."

She obstinately refused: "No, I don't like the idea, at all."

"But at least give me a reason."

She whispered softly: "Because you would be bringing other women here and that I won't have."

He was extremely indignant. "Never, on your life. I promise."

"No, you would bring them in all the same."

"I swear I won't."

"Really and truly?"

"Truly. I give you my word of honour. It will be our house, ours alone." She hugged him, glowing with love: "Then I agree, dearest. But mind if you deceive me once, only once, it will be the finish between us, forever."

He redoubled his promises and he arranged to move in the same day.

Then she said: "Come to dinner on Sunday. My husband has taken a liking to you."

He was flattered.

"Really?"

"Yes, he's quite taken to you. And listen, you remember telling me you were brought up in a château in the country?"

"Yes, why?"

"Then you must know something about agriculture?"

"Yes."

"Well, talk to him about gardening and the crops. He loves all that."

"Right. I won't forget."

She left; but not till after they had been a long time in one another's arms. The duel had intensified her ardour.

And Duroy thought as he went to the office: "How comical all this is! How fantastic! Does she know herself what she wants and what she loves? And what a strange household! What whim of fate joined together this old man and this mad-cap! What kind of reasoning induced this Inspector to marry this schoolgirl? Strange! Love, I suppose."

He concluded: "Anyhow, she's a remarkably lovely mistress. I should be a complete fool to lose her."

CHAPTER VIII

HIS duel had promoted Duroy to the ranks of the chief columnists in *la Vie Française*. But as he suffered from paucity of ideas he made a speciality of declamations on the decline of morals, the slackening of principles, the fall of patriotism, and the 'anaemia' of French honour. (He had himself coined the word 'anaemia' and was inordinately proud of it.)

And when Mme de Marelle, herself full of that mocking, sceptical, sardonic, decadent with which may be termed the 'soul of Paris,' would sneer at his effusions, splitting them asunder with an epigram, he would smile and say cheerfully: "Well, it's all building me up a first class reputation and that's all I'm out for."

He lived now in the rue de Constantinople whither he had transported his trunk, his brush, his razor and his soap which constituted his belongings. Two or three times a week the young woman would arrive before he was up, undress in a minute and glide between the sheets shivering from the cold outside.

Duroy, on his side, dined at her house every Thursday, and made much of her husband, discussing agriculture with him, and as this was a subject on which he was genuinely interested, the two of them were often so engrossed in their dissertations that they altogether forgot the hostess sitting yawning and bored on a sofa.

Laurine too, was lulled to sleep, sometimes on her father's knee, sometimes on 'Bel-Ami's.'

And when the journalist had gone, M de Marelle would never fail to say, in the stiff, formal tone in which he pronounced the most trivial thing: "That young man is a really nice fellow. He has a remarkably cultured mind."

February was running out. In the streets in the mornings, as the flower sellers' carts trundled along, one began to breathe in the delicate scent of violets.

Duroy was living without a cloud on his horizon.

Then, one night, returning home, he found a letter slipped under the door. He looked at the mark and read 'Cannes.' He opened and read it.

"Cannes, Villa Jolie

"MY DEAR FRIEND. You told me, didn't you that I could rely on you in case of need? Well, I have to ask of you a cruel service. It is to come and help me, and not let me be alone in Charles's last moments. He is dying. He may not survive the week. He still gets up but the doctor has warned me.

"I have neither the strength nor the courage alone to watch his suffering day and night. And I anticipate with terror his last moments drawing nearer and nearer. I cannot ask anyone but you for my husband has no family. You were his comrade; and he did his best for you, opening the doors of the journal to you. I ask you to come. I have no one else. Believe me your affectionate friend.

"MADELEINE FORESTIER."

A peculiar sensation, like a breath of air entered Georges' heart, a sense of deliverance, of space opening out before him, and he murmured: "Poor fellow! Of course, I shall go. Poor Charles! But it's the common lot of all of us, after all."

He communicated the contents of the letter to the Director, who gave him leave. "Be as quick as you can," he growled, "you are indispensable."

Georges left for Cannes the next day by the seven o'clock express, having informed the de Marelles by telegram.

He arrived the following day at about four in the evening.

A commissioner took him to the Villa Jolie nestling by the seaside in a little forest of fir trees, dotted with white houses, stretching from Cannes to Juan Bay.

It was a small low house, in the Italian style, by the side of the road which climbs zigzag through the trees, showing at every turn the most lovely views. A maid opened the door and cried:

"Oh! sir, madame has been waiting for you, so anxiously."

He asked: "How is your master?"

"Oh! very bad, sir. He will not be with us long."

He was ushered into the drawing room, designed in rose-pink and blue. The large high window looked out over the city and the sea.

Duroy murmured: "By George, this is a smart little country place! Where the deuce does the money come from?"

The rustling of a dress made him turn round.

Mme Forestier held out both hands to him: "How kind of you to come, how very kind of you"; and abruptly she embraced him. They looked at one another.

She was more pale and thinner, but, as always, cool and fragrant, and her frail appearance made her more lovely. She said: "It is terrible. He knows he is lost and he bullies me frightfully, poor fellow. I've told him you have come. But where is your luggage?"

"I've left it at the station, not knowing what hotel you advise me to stay at, so as to be near you."

She hesitated, then replied: "You must stay here, in the villa. Your room is ready. He is afraid of dying at any moment, and if it happens in the night I should be alone; I will have your luggage sent for."

He bowed: "As you wish."

"Now, come up," she said.

He followed her. She opened a door on the first floor and Duroy perceived near a window, seated in an arm chair and wrapped in blankets, livid under the red splendour of the setting sun, a kind of corpse peering at him. He could scarcely recognize him, rather divining that it must be his friend.

In the room one felt the heat, the drugs, the ether, the disinfectants, that heavy indescribable smell of a room in which a consumptive is breathing his last.

Forestier raised his hand, with a slow painful deliberation.

"So you're here," he said, "come to see me die. I thank you."

Duroy tried to laugh: "To see you die! That wouldn't be at all an amusing spectacle and I certainly didn't decide to visit Cannes for that. I just came to see how you are and for a change."

The other muttered: "Sit down," and lowered his head as if abandoned to thoughts of despair.

He was breathing in quick stifled gasps and now and again emitted a kind of groan, as if to remind the others how ill he was.

As he remained silent his wife opened the window and pointed to the horizon: "Look at it. Isn't it beautiful?"

In front of them the hill, studded with villas sloped down to the city which lay along the whole length of the beach with its head to the right towards the pier dominating the 'old town' surmounted by an ancient watch tower and its feet to the left as far as Cape Croisette facing the Lerins islets. These islets looked like two patches of green in the blue sea. They seemed so flat from above that one might have taken them for two vast sheets of green paper.

And afar off on the horizon on the other side of the bay a long line of blue mountains stood out against the radiant sky, a lovely haunting picture of peaks, some rounded, some jagged, some pointed ending in one vast mountain plunging its foot into the open sea.

Mme Forestier pointed it out: "That is the Esterel," she informed them. The sky behind the dark summits was a golden fiery blood red, more than the naked eye could sustain.

Duroy was subdued in spite of himself by the majesty of the dying day; and not finding any other term to express his awe, said: "Oh! yes, it is amazing."

Forestier lifted his head towards his wife: "Give me a little air."

She replied: "Take care, it's getting late, the sun's going down. You may catch cold and you know that would be bad for you in your state of health."

He made a feverish feeble gesture with his right hand, a ghastly simulation of shaking his fist, and muttered, with an angry grimace, a grimace that displayed his bloodless lips, his wasted cheeks and his fleshless bones: "I tell you I'm stifling. What does it matter, to you whether I die a day sooner or a day later, since, in any case it's all up with me..."

She opened the window to its full extent.

The incoming breeze was wafted on to all three of them like a kiss. It was a soft tender gentle breeze, the first breath of spring fed by the perfumes of the plants and heady flowers growing on the hill side. Forestier drank it in with short feverish gulps. He tapped his finger nails on the arms of his chair and said in a low, hissing, exasperated voice: "Shut the window. It makes me ill. I would sooner die in a cellar."

His wife gently closed the window, then looked far out, her face pressed against the pane.

Duroy, ill at ease would have liked to talk to the sick man, to reassure him. But he could think of nothing cheering to say.

He faltered: "Then you've not improved since you've been here?"

The other shrugged his shoulders with peevish impatience: "You can see that well enough." And his head fell again.

Duroy went on: "It's really lovely here compared with Paris. There it's still full winter. It snows, hails, rains and we have to light the street lamps at three in the afternoon."

Forestier asked: "Anything fresh about the paper?"

"Nothing new. They've taken on little Lacvin in your place from *Voltaire*. But he's not much good; not experienced enough. It's about time you came back."

The sick man muttered: "I! come back! I shall be writing articles six feet underground soon."

Whatever the subject, that one fixed idea came back like clock-work, ceaselessly reappearing in every thought, in every phrase.

Shadows flickering on the light of the dying fire rose and fell in the room, seeming to tint the furniture, the walls, the hangings, the corners with mixed hues of pink and purple. The mirror over the mantel-shelf reflecting the horizon, looked like a sheet of blood.

Mme Forestier still stood motionless, her back to the room, her brow pressed against the window.

And Forestier began to speak in jerky hissing tones heart-rending to hear: "How many more times shall I see the going down of the sun?...eight...ten...fifteen...or twenty...per-

haps thirty, not more. You have plenty of time before you, you others...for me...it's all over... And everything will go on...after me...just the same...as if I was there..."

He was silent for a little while, then went on: "Everything I see reminds me that in a few days I shall see nothing... It is horrible...I shall see nothing...not a thing that exists... the smallest objects that one handles...glasses...table napkins...the beds one rests on so easily...carriages. A drive in the evening is so pleasant.... How I used to love all that." With the fingers of each hand he was making light nervous movements as if he was playing the piano on the two arms of his chair. And each one of his silences was more painful than his words for they both felt that he was obsessed with the most terrifying thoughts.

Suddenly Duroy remembered what Norbert de Varenne had said, but a few weeks before.

"I see death so close to me that I often want to stretch out my arms and push it away. It covers the earth and fills space....I discover it everywhere.... Every little animal crushed on the road, every leaf that falls, every grey hair appearing, tears my heart and says to me: 'There it is, look'."

He hadn't understood till that day; now, looking at Forestier, he understood. And a poignant instinctive bitter anguish entered into him as he knew that quite near, by the chair in which this man sat gasping his life away, hideous death stood with pointing finger. He wanted to get up and be off, to save himself, to return to Paris instantly. If he had only known he would never have come.

Night was invading the room like a mourning shadow falling on the dying man.

The window alone was visible now, its clearer light bringing into relief the young wife's motionless figure.

Forestier demanded peevishly: "Well, aren't they going to bring the lamp in to-day? There you are, that's what you call looking after a sick man."

The shadow of the figure standing out against the window disappeared and an electric bell rang sharply.

Presently a servant came in carrying in a lighted lamp. Mme

Forestier said to her husband: "Will you lie down, or will you come down to dinner?" He muttered: "I'll come down."

They waited a long painful hour for the meal, motionless all three of them, throwing in only an occasional word, some banal commonplace as if there might be danger, some mysterious peril if they let the silence last too long in this room where death prowled.

At last dinner was announced. To Duroy it seemed long, interminable. They didn't speak. They ate silently, crumbling bread with their fingers between the courses; and the servant, waiting on them came and went without a sound for Charles whose frayed nerves could not stand heel taps, had made him don slippers. Only the regular mechanical 'tick tock' of the clock disturbed the unnatural uneasy quietude of the room.

The moment dinner was over, Duroy pleaded fatigue and retired to his room. He leaned out of the window, gazing at the full moon, hanging like the globe of an enormous lamp in the midst of the sky, casting on the white villas its cold, serene ray and spreading over the sea a sheet of soft gently trembling light. And he sought for some plausible reason to get away quickly, inventing excuses, bogus telegrams, a summons back from M Walter.

But resolutions of flight broke down in the morning. Mme Forestier made short work of his excuses and their only effect was to deprive him of the credit for devoted friendship.

It was spring now, the happy joyous spring of the South; and Duroy went down to the sea, feeling that he would see quite enough of Forestier during the day.

When he came back for lunch the domestic said: "Monsieur has asked for you two or three times, sir. Will you go up now?"

He went up. Forestier seemed asleep in his chair. His wife was reading on the sofa.

The invalid looked up and Duroy greeted him cheerfully: "How d'you feel now old fellow? You look fine to me this morning."

The other replied: "Yes I'm better. I feel much stronger;

lunch with Madeleine as quickly as you can. We're going for a drive."

Directly she got Duroy alone the young woman said to him: "To-day he firmly believes he's saved. He's been making plans all the morning. We're off at once to Juan Bay to buy some pottery for our Paris flat. He's quite determined to go. I feel terribly frightened for him in case of an accident. He'll hardly be able to stand the jolting of the carriage on the road."

When the landau came, Forestier went down the stairs, step by step, supported by his servant. As soon as he set eyes on the carriage he wanted it opened.

His wife protested: "You will take cold. It's madness."

He was obstinate: "No, I'm much better. I feel quite well."

They passed through the shady avenues with gardens on either side which make Cannes resemble an English park and then the long sea road to Antibes. Forestier pointed out the countryside. He showed them the country seat of the Royalist pretender, the Count of Paris, and named several others. He was in high spirits, that spurious artificial transient gaiety of the advanced tubercular. He raised a finger, not having the strength to lift his arm.

"Now, there is St. Marguerite's isle and the château Marshal Bazaine escaped from. We ought to have been more careful in that business."

Then he started on old regimental memories—the names of the officers and yarns about them.

Suddenly by a turn in the road the whole of Swan Bay lay before them with its white village at one end and Cape Antibes at the other; and Forestier with childish glee cried: "Ah! The Fleet, that's the Fleet."

In the middle of the Bay they saw about a dozen battle-ships and cruisers like huge steel-covered rocks. They looked grim, misshapen, enormous with their turrets, jutting excrescences, planted on the water as if they had taken root under the sea.

One would hardly imagine them being displaced or removed, they seemed so permanently though clumsily part of the sea.

A great three masted sailing vessel passed among them, all its sails outspread white and joyous. She looked gracious and lovely amid these sinister steel clad monsters of war crouching on the blue waters.

Forestier knew them all. He named them: "The Colbert, the Sovereign, the Admiral Duperre, the Redoubtable, the Devastation,—no I'm wrong, that one over there is the Devastation."

They came to a kind of Pavilion with a notice board: "Juan Bay Art Pottery Products," and the carriage, after skirting a lawn stopped at the gate.

Forestier wanted to buy a couple of vases for his book-shelves. As he could hardly get down from the carriage, they brought specimens out to him, one after the other. He was a long time choosing, consulting his wife and Duroy. "You know it's for the shelf at the end of my study. From my chair I shall have my eyes on it all the time. I want an old pattern, Greek design." He examined the vases minutely, sending some back and making them bring others. At last he made up his mind, and having paid the bill ordered them to be sent off by post immediately. "I'm returning to Paris in a day or two," said he.

They started back but on the coast road, in the hollow of the valley a sudden cold breeze struck them and the invalid began to cough. It was nothing at all at first, a trifling setback. Then it increased, became a continuous fit, then a sort of rattling hiccup. Forestier was suffocating and as he gasped desperately for breath the cough tore at his throat. Nothing calmed him, nothing eased him. They had to carry him from the carriage to his room and Duroy, who was supporting his legs, felt his feet tremble at every convulsion of his lungs.

The warmth of the bed brought no relief from the attack which lasted without stopping till mid-night; at last drugs benumbed the fearful spasms and the sick man remained till day-break sitting up, wide-eyed, in his bed.

The first words he spoke were a call for the barber, for he insisted on getting up every morning to be shaved. He

managed to get up this time. But they had to put him back to bed immediately after and his breathing began to be so quick, so hard, so painful that Mme Forestier, aghast, awakened Duroy who had gone to bed and sent him for the doctor.

He brought Doctor Gavant immediately who prescribed a drug and gave his instructions but when the journalist took him aside to ask his opinion: "It's the last stage," he said. "He'll be dead to-morrow morning. Warn his wife, and get a priest. There's nothing more I can do, though I hold myself entirely at your disposal."

Duroy called Mme Forestier: "He's going to die. The doctor advises sending for a priest. What would you like to do?"

She hesitated for quite a while, then said: "Yes, it had better be done....I'll go and prepare him. I shall tell him the curé has called and would like to see him....I don't know why, I shall say. It will be very kind of you, if you'll go and find one. Be careful whom you choose. Find one who won't insist on formal ritual; one who will just take his confession without pomp or show."

The young man found an old priest who understood the situation. As soon as he went in to the dying man, Mme Forestier went out and sat in the next room with Duroy.

"This has overwhelmed him," she said, "when I spoke to him of the priest, his face took on a ghastly expression as if ...as if...as if he felt that something...had whispered to him ...you know.... He understands. He knows that it is the end...matter of hours."

She was very pale. She went on: "I shall never forget the expression on his face. Certainly he looked on Death in that moment.... He saw it...." They could hear the priest in the next room. He was a little deaf and raised his voice, "No, no, you're not so ill as all that. You are ill, but not dangerously. And the proof is that I'm calling as a friend, a neighbour."

They could not distinguish Forestier's reply. The old man went on: "No, I'm not going to give you communion. We'll talk about that when you're on the mend. But if you would like to avail yourself of my call to make your confession, now

is a very suitable time. I am a pastor, you know I use every opportunity to lead in my flock."

A long silence followed. Forestier must have been speaking in halting whispers.

Then suddenly the priest's voice assumed a different tone, that of one officiating at the altar.

"The mercy of God is infinite. Say the Creed my son. You have forgotten it perhaps. I will help you. Say after me: 'Confiteor Deo omnipotenti....Beatae Mariae semper virgini ...'"

He stopped from time to time to enable the dying man to follow him. Then he said: "Now, your confession..."

The young woman and Duroy did not stir, a prey to a singular anxiety, a strained anticipation.

The sick man murmured something. The priest answered him: "You have acquiesced in sin—of what kind my son?"

Madeleine rose, saying simply: "Let's go into the garden. We don't want to hear his secrets."

They sat down on a garden seat, beneath a flowering rose tree amid the strong sweet scent of carnations.

After some minutes' silence Duroy asked her:

"Will you stay on here, before returning to Paris?"

"Oh! no. As soon as all is over, I shall come back."

"In a fortnight or so?"

"Yes, or a little longer."

He went on: "He has no parents?"

"No, only some cousins: His father and mother died when he was quite young." Both of them watched a butterfly, flitting amongst the carnations, flying from one to the other with swift moving wings, which went on gently fluttering while it rested on the flower. There was a long silence.

The servant came to tell them: "Monsieur le curé has finished;" and they went into the house together.

Forestier seemed visibly more shrunken.

The priest shook hands with him: "Au revoir my son. I shall come again to-morrow." And he left.

The moment he was gone the dying man, gasping for breath tried to raise both hands to his wife. "Save me," he entreated

her. "Save me, my darling...I don't want to die...I don't want to die.... Oh! save me.... Tell me what to do, go and find the doctor.... I will take anything he says....I don't want to....I don't want...."

He began to weep. Two large tears trickled down his wasted cheeks, and the thin corners of his mouth puckered like those of a fretful child. His hands fell back on the bed and began a slow regular continuous movement as if to pick up something on the sheets.

His wife was weeping bitterly: "No, no, it is nothing. It's only a little set-back. You'll soon be better again. That drive yesterday has overtired you."

Forestier's gasps were now more rapid than a dog's exhausted after running, so hurried that one could not count them, so feeble that they could hardly be heard.

He kept repeating: "I don't want to die...Oh! my God... my God...my God...what is coming over me?...I shan't see anything again...anything again...ever...ever...oh! my God!" He was staring before him now at something invisible to the other two, something hideous at which his fixed eyes reflected horror. All the time his two hands continued their dreadful unremitting motion.

Suddenly he began to tremble,—a violent shuddering shaking his whole body; and he groaned: "The cemetery...for me ...my God!..."

He spoke no more. He lay still, haggard and panting.

Time passed; mid-night sounded from the clock of the neighbouring convent. Duroy left the room to eat a little. Mme Forestier refused to take anything. He came back after an hour. The dying man had not moved, his thin fingers plucking all the time at the sheets as though to draw them towards his face.

His wife was seated in an arm chair at the foot of the bed. Duroy sat opposite her. They waited in silence.

A nurse had come, sent by the doctor; she was dozing by the window. Duroy was beginning to nod himself when some premonition roused him. He opened his eyes just in time to see Forestier close his own, like two lights being extinguished.

There was a dry rattle in his throat, and two thin threads of blood appeared at the corners of his mouth, then trickled down over his chest. His hands stopped their hideous tattoo. He had ceased to breathe. His wife realized it at once. She uttered a moaning cry, and sank to her knees across the bed sobbing unrestrainedly. The nurse, awake now, came across. "It is over," she said. Georges surprised and shocked mechanically made the sign of the cross, then recovering his self-possession murmured with a sigh of relief: "It's been shorter than I thought it would."

When the first shock subsided and the first uncontrollable grief wore itself out, all the duties and services which death demands had to be done. Duroy left them before nightfall.

On his return he was very hungry. Mme Forestier managed to eat a little. Then both of them settled in the death chamber to keep vigil over the corpse.

Two candles flickered on the table. They were alone, the young man and the young woman by the side of him who was no more; at whom they gazed without exchanging a word or moving.

Georges, disquieted by the darkened room, contemplated his dead friend steadfastly. His eyes and his mind fascinated, drawn by this fleshless face made to appear even more wasted by the flickering light remained intently fixed on him. This was his comrade, Charles Forestier, who only yesterday was talking to him. What a strange and terrible thing it was this complete extinction of a human being! He recalled the words of Norbert de Varenne haunted by the fear of death.

"Never a single one of us returns, never...Millions, billions of beings will come into existence...but never can I appear again."

Yes, millions would be born, all more or less alike, with eyes, a nose, a mouth, a skull, and intelligence within it, but never again could he appear who was lying on that bed.

For a few years he had struggled, eaten, laughed, loved and hoped like the rest of mankind. Now it was finished, for him, finished for all time. One life! A few days and then nothing. One is born, grows, is happy, hopes, dies. Farewell! man or

woman, whoever you are, never again can you appear on this earth! And yet everyone of us bears within him the burning unrealizable desire for immortality, each is a sort of world within a world, and each is soon to be completely annihilated, a dungheap of new germs. Plants, animals, men, stars, hemispheres, all live to die. And never a one returns, insect, man or planet. A confused vast crushing terror seized Duroy's mind, terror of this inexorable inevitable nothingness destroying each brief miserable life. He felt himself already crumbling under the menace. He thought of the flies living a few hours, of animals a few days, men a few years, worlds a few ages. What difference was there in any of them? A few dawns more, then nothing. He turned away his eyes so as not to look at the corpse.

Mme Forestier, her head lowered, seemed also plunged in gloomy reflections. Her fair hair and sad face looked so lovely that a quick thrill like the touch of hope passed through the young man's heart. Why grieve when he had so many years of life before him?

He looked at her closely. Absorbed in thought she didn't notice him. He said to himself: "There, anyhow, is the one good thing in life: Love! To hold a beloved woman in one's arms! That is the limit of human bliss."

What luck the dead man had had to meet this cultured charming companion! How did they become acquainted? What had possessed her to marry a humdrum poverty-stricken youth? And how had she managed to make the man of him, she undoubtedly had?

He thought of all the mysterious secrets locked up in every life; and remembered the gossiping rumours about the Count de Vaudrec, how he was said to have given her dowry and arranged her marriage.

What was she going to do now? Who would marry her? A member of Parliament as Mme de Marelle hinted or some clever young man with a future, a superior type of Forestier? Had she any intentions, plans, any preconceived ideas? How he would have liked to know that! But why was he so anxious about what her plans were? He asked himself the question

and discovered that his uneasiness arose from one of those confused secret inner thoughts which we hide even from ourselves and which we find out only when we subject ourselves to searching self-examination. Yes, why shouldn't he try to effect the conquest himself? What a strong formidable force he would become with her by his side? He would advance quickly and go far, that was certain. And why should he not succeed? He was fairly certain that she had a liking for him, something more than sympathy, one of those affections which arise between like natures, in part mutual attraction and in part a sort of silent complicity one with the other. She knew him to be intelligent, resolute, tenacious; she could put her trust in him. In her time of stress had she not sent for him? And why? Was it not, in a way, a choice, an indication, a selection?

If her thoughts went out to him just at the time when she was about to become a widow, was it not because in her subconscious mind she had already contemplated him as the one who would be her new companion and ally? He felt an impetuous desire to find out, to question her, to ascertain what her intentions were. He must leave the day after the morrow; obviously he could not stay in the same house with a young woman. So he must hurry; he must, before returning to Paris, skilfully, tactfully find out from her what her plans were, and not leave her free to come back and succumb to the proposals of some other man and perhaps become irrevocably engaged.

There was deep silence in the room; the only sound was the regular metallic ticking of the clock over the mantel-piece.

He murmured: "You must be very tired?"

She answered: "I am completely crushed."

The noise of their voices startled them, sounding strangely in the gloomy room. Both looked suddenly at the dead man's face as if they expected to see it move, to hear him speak to them, as he had but a few hours earlier.

Duroy went on: "It is a terrible blow for you, such a complete change in your life, an absolute upheaval of heart and mind alike."

She wept softly without replying.

"It is sad for a young woman to find herself alone, as you will be."

She was silent.

"Whatever happens you know our pact. You can use me as you will. I belong to you."

She held out her hand to him, with one of those sorrowful grateful looks which remain in our hearts forever.

"Thank you," she said, "you are so good. If I dared, and if there was anything I could do for you, I would say: 'Rely on me.'"

He had taken her extended hand and held it, pressing it, with a warm desire to kiss it. He decided to venture it, and drew it slowly to his mouth. The slim scented hand was warm and a little feverish. For a long time he held it pressed against his lips, then when he realized that the friendly caress was lasting too long, he released her hand. She said gravely:

"Yes, I shall be quite alone; but I shall be brave."

He didn't know how to force upon her the fact that he would be happy, more than happy to make her his wife. How would he tell her, at that time, in that place, before that body? He sought about for one of those convenient ambiguous complicated phrases with a hidden meaning which express what one wants them to by their calculated reticence.

But the dead body, stretched rigidly before them, hindered him, a silent barrier. For some time he had felt something offensive in the close atmosphere, the first carrion breath which the poor dead, laid out on their bed, waft towards those who keep vigil over them and with which presently they will fill their coffin.

Duroy asked her: "Shouldn't we open the window? It seems to me the air is very bad."

"Yes, please do," she answered, "I was noticing it myself."

He went to the window and opened it. All the perfumed fragrance of the night came in, gently flickering the flames of the two lighted candles by the bed. The moon, as on the other evening, spread its calm serene light upon the white walls of the villas and the broad shining expanse of the sea. Duroy breathing it all in with both lungs, suddenly felt full of

surging hope as one rejoiced by premonition of coming good tidings. He turned round: "Shall we go out into the fresh air a little?" he said. "It will do you good."

She rose quietly and went out with him into the garden. They sat side by side. He spoke to her in lowered tones: "Please listen to me carefully and understand clearly what I say. Don't be angry or shocked because I speak of such a thing at a moment like this, but I shall have to leave you after to-morrow and when you return to Paris it may be too late. This is what I want to say. I am only a poor devil with no money and with his way to make in the world, but I have the will and the brains to win with. I am on the way now, well on the way. With a man like me, just beginning, you don't know. Well, so much the worse or so much the better. I told you one day in your house that my dream, the dearest wish of my heart, would have been to marry a woman like you. I repeat that wish to you now, to-day. Don't answer. Let me go on. I am not proposing to you. The place and the time would make that hideous. But I want you to know that you can make me happy by one word, that you can have me by that word either as a brotherly friend or as a husband, as you wish, that my heart and my whole being are yours to do what you like with. I don't want you to give me any answer now; I would rather we didn't allude to it any more here. But when you come back to Paris you can let me know what you have decided. Until then don't let's say another word about it."

He had spoken without looking at her, as if sprinkling his words into the night, and she seemed not to have heard him, so still she was, looking straight before her with fixed impenetrable gaze at the wide pale expanse of the sea lighted by the moon.

They remained a long time, side by side, both silent and thoughtful.

Then she murmured: "It's becoming a little cold," and turning round she went back to the bedside. He followed her,

As they drew near he noticed that the body was becoming offensive; and he moved his chair farther away, unable to bear it.

He said: "They'll have to put him in his coffin in the morning."

She answered: "Yes, I know; it is arranged. The undertaker is coming about eight o'clock."

Duroy sighed: "Poor dear fellow!" She gave a long shuddering sob of sorrowful resignation.

They looked on him less often now, accustomed already to the idea of death, beginning to submit mentally to this annihilation which only such a short while before had revolted and dismayed them who were themselves but mortal flesh too.

They no longer spoke, continuing their sleepless vigil. But towards mid-night Duroy began to doze. When he awoke he saw that Mme Forestier had fallen into a light sleep too. He settled himself into a more comfortable position, grumbling: "Good Lord, I must say it would be pleasanter between the sheets."

A sudden sound roused him with a start. The nurse entered. It was broad day. The young woman on the chair in front seemed as surprised as he was. She was rather pale, but dainty, fresh and graceful as ever, in spite of the long night spent in a chair.

Looking at the corpse Duroy shuddered violently. "Look," he cried, "his beard." The beard had grown in the few hours on the decomposing face, as it had been wont to grow in a few hours when the face was that of a living man. They were appalled by this life continuing on the dead body and recoiled from it as from some frightful phenomenon, some unnatural menace of revival, one of those abnormal terrifying events which bewilder and confound the intelligence.

They both rested till eleven o'clock. Then Charles was put into his coffin and immediately they both felt a sense of relief, of a load lifted.

They faced one another at lunch with wakening desire to speak of happier, more comforting things, to return to life now that they had finished with death. Through the large open window the gentle warmth of spring penetrated, bringing with it the scented breeze of the carnations flowering outside the door.

Mme Forestier proposed a turn in the garden and they walked slowly round the little lawn voluptuously breathing in the mild air redolent with the refreshing odour of the fir trees.

Unexpectedly she spoke to him, keeping her head turned away from him, as she had the night before.

She spoke slowly in low serious tones:

"Listen, my dear friend, I have thought over...already... what you suggested and I don't want to let you leave without any sort of answer. I don't say, yes or no, now. We will wait and see and get to know one another better. Reflect well on your side. Don't let yourself be carried away by an impulse or by passing infatuation. But, if I speak of this to you, before poor Charles is even buried, it is because it is important that you should know who I am, so that you will no longer nourish the hope which you expressed to me if you are not of a...of a character...of the type to understand me and bear with me.

"Understand this clearly. Marriage to me is not a bond but a partnership. I intend to be free, completely free always, in my acts, in my arrangements, in my comings and goings. I could never tolerate control or jealousy or even discussion on my conduct. I would undertake, of course, never to lower or compromise the name of any man I married, never to make him look ridiculous or be despised. But, on his side, he would have to undertake to see in me an equal, an ally, not an inferior nor an obedient submissive wife. My ideas, I know, are not everyone's but I shall not change them in any way. Now, I've been completely frank.

"Let me add one thing: don't reply; it would be useless and unwise. We will see one another again and talk it all over, perhaps, much later on. Now, you go out and have a look round, I'm going back to be near him." He slowly kissed the hand she held out to him and went away without a word.

In the evening they saw one another only at dinner. Immediately after they retired to their rooms, thoroughly tired out.

Charles Forestier was buried the next day without pomp or show in the Cannes cemetery. And Georges Duroy booked his

seat in the Paris express leaving at one-thirty.

Mme Forestier saw him off at the station. They strolled about the platform talking of everyday affairs till the train arrived.

The journalist arranged his belongings, then got out again for another few minutes' talk with her. He was suddenly seized with sadness, grief, and a violent regret at leaving her, as if he was going to lose her forever. Someone shouted: "All aboard for Marseilles, Lyons, Paris;" Duroy got in, bent over the door for a farewell word or two. There was a whistle and the train pulled softly out of the station.

The young man leaned out of the carriage watching her standing motionless looking after him. Suddenly just before he lost sight of her, he put both hands to his mouth and threw her a kiss.

Shyly, hesitatingly, she returned it.

PART TWO

CHAPTER I

GEORGES DUROY had resumed all his old habits.

Settled again in the little ground floor flat, in the rue de Constantinople, his life was uneventful, discreet, like that of a man rehearsing a new existence. Even his relations with Mme de Marelle had taken on a kind of conjugal respectability, as if he was practising, in advance, the coming event; and his mistress, surprised and amused at the humdrum tranquillity of their union chaffed him about it.

"You are more husband-like than my husband; it was hardly worth the trouble of changing over."

Mme Forestier had not come back. She lingered on at Cannes. Eventually she wrote to him fixing the middle of April for her return, but made no allusion whatever to the circumstances in which they had parted. He waited. And if she was in two minds and hesitating between them, on his part he was determined to win her over and to take every possible means to bring about their marriage. He had faith in his luck, the seductive power he felt within him, that power, vague but irresistible, with which he could subdue every type of woman.

A short note warned him that the decisive hour was at hand.

"I am in Paris. Come and see me.

"Madeleine Forestier."

Not a word more. It came by special messenger at nine o'clock; and at three the same afternoon, he was in her house.

She held out both hands to him, smiling her characteristic open, pleasant smile. For some seconds their eyes met. Then she murmured: "How good you were to have come to me in that terrible time." He answered, "You could have commanded anything and I would have done it." They sat down and she insisted on all the news, of the Walters, of their colleagues on the journal, of the paper itself.

"I miss it a great deal," she said, "tremendously. I had become a journalist in my heart. Do you know that is my

real métier."

She became silent. He thought he understood, that there was in her smile, in the tone of her voice, in the words themselves a kind of invitation; and although he had made up his mind not to rush things, he heard himself faltering.

"Well!...why...why not resume...that métier...under... under the name of Duroy?"

At once she became serious and laying her hand on his arm, she said: "Don't let us speak of that yet."

But he assumed that she was accepting him. He fell on his knees to her, self-possession gone, kissing her hands passionately, awkwardly, clumsily saying over and over again: "Thank you...thank you.... How I worship you!"

She rose. As he did so too he saw that she had become very pale. Then he realized how much he had missed her, what she meant to him, how he had longed for her; and as they stood face to face, he clasped her to him and pressed on her brow one long kiss, tender, serious, grave. For a moment only her head rested on his breast, then she freed herself and said quietly:

"Listen my friend, I have not yet decided anything. Still it is possible it may be 'yes'. But you must give me your word to keep it an absolute secret till I release you from the promise."

He swore it and left, his heart bursting with happiness.

From that time he was discretion itself in his visits to her. He did not ask her to put her acceptance in more formal words for she had a way of speaking of the future, of saying "later on", of making plans ahead in which their two lives were intermingled, which continually supplied an answer, a better and more delicate one than any precise promise.

Duroy worked hard and spent little, saving money so as not to be married without a sou. He became as miserly as he had been prodigal. Summer passed, then autumn with no one suspecting anything. They saw but little of one another and then only in public.

One evening, holding his eyes with her clear gaze Madeleine said to him.

"You haven't discussed us with Mme de Marelle, have you?"

"No dear. Since you bound me to silence, I've not spoken a word to a living soul."

"Well, it's time to tell her. I'll tell the Walters myself. We'll do it this week, shall we?"

He coloured, "Yes, to-morrow."

Slowly her eyes left his, as if not to notice his embarrassment, then she added: "If you like we could be married at the beginning of May."

He expressed himself delighted.

"I would like it to be the tenth of May because that's my birthday."

"The tenth of May it is."

"Your parents live near Rouen, don't they? I think you told me so."

"Yes, near Rouen at Canteleu."

"What are they?"

"They are...they are small gentry."

"Ah! I very much want to meet them."

He hesitated, confused: "But...well...they are..."

He pulled himself together and played the man: "Dear, they are peasants, village innkeepers, who bled themselves white to send me to the University. Mind, I am not ashamed of them but their...simplicity...their countrified ways might bore you."

She smiled delightfully, her face beaming good humour.

"No. I shall love them. We must go and see them. I insist on it. I am the daughter of little people myself...but I lost them both. I have no one in the wide world..." she took his hand and added "...except you."

And he felt himself moved, softened, conquered as he had never before been by any woman.

"I have an idea," she said, "but it's rather hard to explain."

He asked what it was.

"Well, it's rather an awkward thing to speak about...but I have like all women my...weaknesses, my small failings, I love what glitters and resounds. I would have loved to bear an aristocratic name. Couldn't you...on our marriage...ennoble

yourself a little?"

He reddened as if she had suggested something indelicate to him, then replied frankly—"I've often thought of it myself but it didn't seem easy."

"Why not?"

He laughed: "Because I'm afraid of looking a fool."

"Not at all, not in the least. Any number of people do it and no one scoffs. Cut your name in two: Du Roy. That will be splendid."

He answered quickly, like a man who had considered the matter before.

"No, that won't do at all. It's too transparently a dodge, too common, too well known. I had thought of taking the name of my district, just as a literary nom de plume at first, then little by little tacking it on to my own and, finally but much later, dissecting my name as you suggest."

She asked: "Your country is Canteleu?"

"Yes."

She pondered over it: "No, I don't like the ending of it. Let's see if we can't modify the word somehow—Canteleu."

She had taken up a pen and was scribbling names studying them intently. Suddenly she exclaimed, "Here it is. I've got it!" She held out a sheet of paper to him and he read on it: "Madame Duroy de Cantel."

He thought over it for a little and then solemnly announced that he approved of it and that it was excellent.

She was enchanted and kept on repeating: "Duroy de Cantel, Duroy de Cantel, Madame Duroy de Cantel. It is splendid, splendid."

She added with an air of conviction: "And you'll see how easy it will be to have it accepted by everyone. But we must take this chance. It will be too late afterwards. From tomorrow you are to sign your articles D. de Cantel, and your news items simply Duroy. The latter will appear everyday in the press and no one will be surprised at your having adopted it as just a pen name. From the moment we are married we shall begin to edge in the new name, by telling our friends casually, that you had renounced your *du* through

modesty until you had established your position, or we might even say nothing at all. What is your father's name?"

"Alexandre"

She repeated the name two or three times: "Alexandre, Alexandre" testing the sound of the syllables, then she wrote down on a sheet of white paper:

"Monsieur and Madame Alexandre du Roy de Cantel have the honour of announcing the marriage of their son, Monsieur Georges du Roy de Cantel to Madame Madeleine Forestier."

She looked at the writing from a little way off, ravished with the result and then declared: "With a little method, one can succeed in anything one undertakes."

In the street again, and quite determined henceforth to call himself du Roy, and even du Roy de Cantel, he seemed to himself to take on a new importance and dignity. He walked more arrogantly, held his head higher, twirled his moustache more fiercely, as became an aristocrat taking his stroll. He experienced within him a kind of happy desire to inform passers-by: "I am called du Roy de Cantel."

But he was hardly within doors before the thought of Mme de Marelle worried him, and he wrote her at once, making an appointment for the next day.

"It's going to be hard," he thought. "I'm in for a first class hurricane." Then with the characteristic escapism which enabled him to ignore the disagreeable things of life he started a whimsical article on the proposed new taxes intended to stabilize the Budget, in which he mulcted wearers of the red ribbon at a hundred francs a year, and the nobility, from baron to prince, at from five hundred to a thousand.

He signed it: D. de Cantel.

In the morning he received a "little blue" from his mistress saying she would arrive at one o'clock.

He waited for her with some trepidation but quite resolved to rush things, to tell her everything frankly from the onset; then, after the first shock, demonstrate to her dispassionately that he could not remain a bachelor for ever and that, as M de Marelle seemed obstinately determined to live, he had to think of someone other than herself for a lawful spouse. It

was all very simple really.

But he felt nervous none the less, and when the bell rang, his heart pounded violently.

She threw herself into his arms. "Happy days, Bel-Ami,"—then realizing his cold response she looked at him and demanded:

"What's the matter?"

"Sit down," said he. "We're going to have a straight talk."

She sat down without removing her hat, only raising her veil, and waited. His eyes dropped; he was preparing his opening; and began in slow level tones.

"My dear friend, you find me terribly worried, terribly grieved, terribly embarrassed at what I have to own to you. I love you so much, truly I love you from the bottom of my heart, and the dread of giving you pain hurts me more even than the news I have to break to you."

She went deathly white, beginning to tremble, and faltered: "What is it? Tell me quickly."

He spoke in sad but resolved tones with that sham depression that we make use of to convey bad tidings.

"I am going to be married!"

She uttered a groan, that of a woman about to lose consciousness, a grievous stricken sob and began to struggle for breath, speechless, suffocating.

As she said nothing he went on: "You can have no idea how much I have suffered in coming to this decision. But I have neither money nor position. I am alone, lost in Paris. I must have someone near me, an adviser, a consoler, a prop, a support. It's an ally, a partner that I have sought for,—and her I have found."

He was silent, hoping that she would answer, steeling himself to frantic rage, violence, personal injury.

Her hand was pressed against her heart as if to hold it in and she breathed in hard painful gasps, her whole body, even her head, trembling.

He took her hand resting on the arm of the couch; she tore it violently away. Then murmured as if in a stupor: "God! ...my God!..."

He knelt down before her, not venturing to touch her, more moved by her silence than he would have been by any reproaches: "Clo, my little Clo, think of my plight, try to understand how I am placed. Oh! if only I could have married you, that would have been ideal happiness! But you are married. What can I do? Think, dearest, think. I have to establish myself in the world and I can't do it, so long as I have no background, no home life. If you only knew!... There have been times when I've wanted to kill your husband...." He spoke very gently, making his voice persuasive, seductive, sounding like music to the ear.

He saw two large tears gather slowly in his mistress's staring eyes then trickle down her cheeks while two more formed to follow them. He entreated her: "Oh! don't weep, Clo, don't weep...you are rending my heart."

Then she made her effort, a gallant effort for dignity and pride, though when she spoke it was in the quivering tone of a woman about to break down.

"Who is she?"

For a second he hesitated, then realizing it was useless: "Madeleine Forestier."

Mme de Marelle, shivered throughout her whole body. She was silent, concentrating with so much intensity that she seemed to have forgotten that he was there at her feet. And two transparent drops ceaselessly gathered in her eyes, fell and formed again. She rose. He knew that she was leaving him without saying a word, without reproaches, without forgiveness; and he felt stricken, humiliated to the quick. He wanted to keep her back and gripped her dress feeling through the material her round limbs stiffen to resist him. He supplicated: "Don't leave me like that, I beg of you."

She gazed at him, with that moist despairing eye, lovely, sorrowful, showing all the grief in woman's heart, and murmured:

"I have... There is nothing I can say...there is...nothing I can do.... You...you are right...you...you have chosen... chosen wisely...what you want..."

And freeing herself with a quick movement she was gone,

and he made no further attempt to detain her.

Once alone, he got to his feet, stunned as if he had received a blow on the head; then he pulled himself together, uttering: "Well, for better or for worse it's over anyway...and without a scene. That suits me." And relieved of an enormous load, feeling himself suddenly free, delivered, all ready for his new life, he began shadow boxing against the wall, launching mighty blows with his clenched fist in a sort of frenzy of success and power as if he had been battling against Destiny; and when Madeleine asked him "Have you told Mme de Marelle?" he answered her easily and naturally.

Her clear eyes searched his: "And was she not upset?"

"No, not in the least. Far from it. She thought it an ideal match."

Their engagement was soon known. One or two were astonished, others pretended they had known it all along, the rest smiled and let it be assumed that they were not surprised.

The young man who now signed his articles D. de Cantel, his reports Duroy, and his occasional political contributions, du Roy, passed at least half his time at his fiancée's house. He treated her with sisterly familiarity, into which there began to creep a real though hidden tenderness, desire concealed as if it were a weakness.

She had decided that the marriage should be completely secret, with only the two witnesses present and that they would leave the same evening for Rouen. The next day they would visit his old parents and stay for a short while with them.

Duroy was against the idea and tried hard to make her give it up, but, in the end, she had her way.

The 10th of May came round. They dispensed with any religious service since there were no guests and after a short ceremony at the Registry Office the six o'clock evening train from Saint-Lazare bore them off on the way to Rouen. They had hardly exchanged a dozen words when they found themselves alone in the compartment. A long look passed between them and they began to laugh. It was to hide a certain embarrassment which neither wished the other to notice. The train

passed smoothly through the long Batignolles station and entered the wide bare arid plain running with the Seine fortifications. From time to time Duroy or his wife uttered some commonplace platitude, then gazed out of the window again. At Asnières bridge the view of the river with its barges, fishermen, and scullers brightened them up. The sun, the strong sun of May spread its bright rays on the small craft and upon the still, placid river almost without current or eddy, as if subdued under the heat of departing day. A sailing ship in mid-river had stretched over its two banks, two great triangles of snow white canvas to coax the faintest whisper of a breeze. It looked like some great bird ready for flight.

Duroy murmured: "I love the country round Paris. Some of my happiest memories are here."

She answered: "And the little yachts. How pretty they are gliding along the river in the sunset."

They fell silent as if both realized that these spoken recollections of their past lives were unwise; perhaps they were already musing on the poetry of regrets. Sitting opposite his wife Duroy took her hand and softly kissed it.

"When we get back," he said, "we'll come here sometimes to dine."

She came back to earth in her matter-of-fact way: "We shall have lots of things to attend to." It was as though she said: "Be realistic. The sentimental has to be sacrificed to the practical."

He retained her hand, asking himself uneasily how he was to proceed to caresses. The ignorance of young girls had never troubled him; but the alert, subtle intelligence that he sensed in Madeleine made him feel awkward. He was afraid of making a fool of himself, of looking ridiculous, of being too timid.

He squeezed her hand with gentle pressure, without the least response from her to his appeal.

"It seems so strange to me that you are my wife."

She looked surprised: "But why?"

"I don't know. It just seems odd. I've always wanted to hold you in my arms and now I'm surprised at having the

right to."

She calmly offered her cheek to him. He kissed it as if it were a sister's.

"The first time I saw you, (you remember at that dinner party Forestier invited me to?) I said to myself: 'Parbleu, if only I could discover a woman like her!' Well! It's done. I have her!"

She looked at him sedately but with her bright clear eyes smiling: "That's nice of you," she answered.

He thought: "I'm too cold. I'm clumsy. I must go at it more quickly;" but all he said was: "How did you get to know Forestier?"

She answered with teasing malice:

"Are we going to Rouen to talk about him?"

He coloured: "I'm an ass. But you do make me so nervous."

She was delighted at that: "I! Impossible! Make you nervous!"

He moved across and sat at her side, very close.

She exclaimed "Oh! a deer!"

The train was going through Saint-Germain forest: and she had seen a frightened stag leap a ditch at one bound.

While she was gazing out of the open window, Duroy stopped and kissed her a long kiss, a kiss of love by the tiny curls at the nape of her neck.

For appreciable moments she remained still, then raised her head: "You're tickling me. Stop it please."

But he persisted, his lips moving softly over the white flesh in a long sensuous languorous caress.

She moved restlessly: "Now please, no more."

His arm crept round her. He pressed her to him. Then his lips assailed hers, like a hawk darting on its prey.

She struggled, pushed him away, tried to free herself.

She succeeded at length and said again: "Stop it now."

He hardly heard her and strained her to him again half suffocating her, kissing her with greedy trembling lips, trying to force her back at full length on the cushions.

With a great effort she struggled free again. She stood up

resolutely. "Now listen Georges, this must stop. We're not children, either of us. We can easily wait till Rouen."

He sat down again, very red in the face, chilled and subdued by her commonsense realism. Then he got himself under control and said cheerfully:

"All right, I will wait. But I'm so done up now that I shan't be able to speak a dozen words till we get there; and please note that we are only just passing Poissy."

"I'll do the talking," was her reply, and she proceeded to do so with cool precision, her subject being their plans for the future. They must keep on the flat she had occupied with her first husband, and Duroy was to inherit both Forestier's post and his salary.

All this she had settled before their marriage, with the shrewdness of a business man, as well as all the financial details of their home life.

The marriage had been upon the separate estate basis and she had foreseen and provided for every possible future contingency; death, divorce, the birth of one or several children. The young man brought into the partnership, four thousand francs he told her, but of that sum he had borrowed fifteen hundred. The balance represented what he had managed to put by in the year before the wedding. The young wife contributed forty thousand which she explained Forestier had left her. She referred to him, citing his example. "He was a very saving fellow, steady and a hard worker. In a very little while he would have made a fortune."

Duroy was not listening; his thoughts were elsewhere.

She stopped, cogitating and then went on:

"Three or four years from now you should be easily earning from thirty to forty thousand francs a year. That's what Charles would have done if he had been spared."

Georges, who began to find the lesson a trifle on the long side, answered: "It seems to me that, after all, we are going to Rouen to discuss him."

She tapped his cheek lightly: "True. That was naughty of me." She laughed happily.

He was ostentatiously holding his hands on his knees like a

disciplined little boy learning his lessons.

"You do look comical like that," she said.

He answered: "It's my part that you are drilling into me every minute and I'll not stray from it."

"Why?"

"Because you are taking over the direction of the house, of all our affairs and even of my person. In fact you have the expert qualifications of a widow."

She was taken aback.

"Now what exactly do you mean by that?"

"That you have the practical experience that will dispel my ignorance and the expert knowledge of the technique of marriage which will polish up and smarten my bachelor innocence, that's all."

She cried: "That's coarse."

"It's true, none the less. I know nothing of women, not a thing, but you do know all about men, for you are a widow—you are going to educate me maritally...to-night...and if you like you can begin...at once."

She was greatly amused.

"Well, upon my word, if you're counting on me for that..."

He went on in the voice of a college student conning his syllabus.

"Certainly...I do count upon it...I count upon you to give me a solid course of instruction...in twenty lessons...ten for the elementary preliminaries...the theory and grammar of it...ten for the rhetorical side and practical and technical demonstration.... Me! I don't know a thing about it."

She laughed deliciously.

"How silly you are!"

"And as you are beginning to 'thee and thou' me I will follow your example and I say to thee, my darling, I love thee more and more from second to second and I find Rouen very far off indeed."

He began to put on the stagey intonation of an actor with a happy suggestiveness and exaggeration of manner which amused the young wife, used as she was to the unconventional ways and broad jests of that greatest of all Bohemians the

literary man.

She looked at him covertly, finding him really charming and feeling that desire we all have to pluck the fruit from the tree, contending with the voice of reason which counsels us to wait till dinner and eat it at the proper time.

Then she said blushing slightly at the thoughts which were weakening her. "My little pupil, profit by my experience, my very wide experience. Kisses in the train are worth nothing. They upset the tummy."

The blush deepened and she whispered: "There's no need to cut down the corn till the harvest."

He chuckled, excited by the double meaning of the words coming from her pretty little mouth; and, making a mock solemn gesture, with a movement of the lips as if uttering a prayer he declared: "I am putting myself under the protection of Saint Anthony, patron of the tempted. Now I am iron."

Night came on softly, with its transparent shadow enfolding as with a light veil the open countryside on their right. The train followed the course of the Seine, and both of them began to look down on the river displaying itself like a huge riband of polished metal, and the reflections red, purple, flame coloured of the dying sun, little by little, sadly, diminishing, deepening, darkening. And the country plunged itself into night with that sinister chill, that chill of death which every twilight brings about on earth.

The melancholy of evening came through the open windows and entered both minds so carefree just before. They were silent now.

They had drawn close to one another to watch this agony of the day, of this fine clear day in May.

At Mantes the little oil lamp was lighted, spreading its frail trembling yellow light on the grey drapery of the cushions.

Duroy loosened his wife's clothes and pressed her to him. His desire so piercing but a little while ago had given place to tenderness, a languorous tenderness, a gentle wish for little comforting caresses, the soft endearments with which one lulls little children to sleep.

He murmured very gently: "I will love you my little Made."

The kindness in his voice moved her and she offered him her mouth, bending over him as his head leaned against the warmth of her breast.

A kiss, very long, quiet, profound; a start; a rough wild embrace; a short panting struggle; a violent uncouth clumsy coupling. Then they lay passively in one another's arms, a little frustrated both of them, weary but tender still, till the whistle of the train announced an approaching station.

Strumming with her fingers on the ruffled hair at his temples, she declared: "That was very crude. We behaved like a pair of street urchins."

He was kissing her hands, going from one to the other with feverish speed, and only replied: "I adore you my little Made."

Till they reached Rouen they sat motionless almost, cheek against cheek, eyes on the black night or watching the occasional lights of houses fitting by, happy in feeling their physical nearness to one another, and in the glowing anticipation of a fuller, freer, more unguarded union.

They put up at a hotel looking out on the quay, and after a little—very little—soup went to bed.

The chambermaid wakened them the next morning as the clock struck eight.

They had their morning tea in bed. Duroy gazed on his wife. Suddenly, impetuously he seized her in his arms with the joyous thrill of a man who knows he has found a treasure.

"My little Made, how much I love you...how much...how much."

She smiled—that assured confident charming smile—returning his kisses. "I, also...maybe."

He was still uneasy about the visit to his people. Already, he had often forewarned her, prepared her, sermonized about it. He started it all over again. "Mind, they are peasants, real ones, not comic opera rustics."

She laughed: "Don't I know it! You've told me often enough. Come, get up and let me get up too."

He jumped out of bed and began pulling on his socks.

"We shall be very uncomfortable in the house, most un-

comfortable. There's only an old bed with a straw mattress in my room. They know nothing about eider-down at Canteleu."

She seemed delighted: "So much the better. It'll be nice to sleep badly...close to...close to you...and to wake at cock-crow."

She had reached for her peignor, a filmy thing of white silk which Duroy at once recognized. The sight of it irritated him. Why? He knew well his wife possessed a dozen of these morning fripperies. He could not expect her to destroy her trousseau and buy a new one. None the less he would have preferred that her lingerie of the bedroom, of the night, of love, had been different from that which she had worn for the other man. It seemed to him that the thin transparent material had kept something of its contact with Forestier. He walked across to the window and lit a cigarette.

The sight of the harbour, of the wide river mouth full of graceful sailing vessels and squat tramps with their paddles noisily whirling, moved him familiar though it was.

"How beautiful it all is," he exclaimed.

Madeleine ran across and with both hands on her husband's shoulder, leaned over him, peeping out. She was charmed, delighted.

"Oh! how lovely! how very lovely! I never knew there were so many ships anywhere."

They left an hour later, for they had written the old people that they would arrive for lunch.

A venerable open cab rumbled them along shakily, and as noisily as an iron foundry. They passed down a long ugly boulevard, then through flowery meadows, and began to climb the hillside.

Madeleine snugly settled in the depths of the old carriage, was dozing under the sun's warm caress, like one lying in a warm bath of light and fragrant country air.

Her husband roused her.

"Look," he said.

They had come to a halt at the famous viewpoint known and renowned to travellers the world over.

Below them lay the great valley, noble and majestic with the clear sparkling river running from end to end through it, dotted with countless islets, curving gently as it drew near Rouen. The old city was spread out on the right bank, fairy-like in the dim mist of the morning with the sunbeams on its roof-tops, its thousand fantastic spires and turrets delicate and frail like giant toys, its square and round towers with their heraldic crowns of bygone chivalry, its gothic belfries and campaniles and dominating all the vast cathedral and its sharp spire like an arrow of bronze, the tallest, perhaps, in the world.

The sheer loveliness of it all took their breath away, and the coachman settled himself to a long wait, knowing from experience its effect on travellers of every race.

They resumed their drive. Suddenly Duroy saw two old people several hundred yards away. He leapt out of the cab. "There they are," he exclaimed. "I recognized them in a second."

Two peasants were ambling towards them, not too steady on their feet, stumbling a little and occasionally colliding. The man was short, stocky, ruddy, stoutish, and vigorous, in spite of his age, the woman, heavy, withered, bent, and dreary, a typical rustic working woman who has toiled from infancy, laboured stoically while her husband gossiped and drank with his customers.

Madeleine had got down from the cab. She looked at the two poor old souls stumbling along with a tightening at her heart and sorrowful pity that she had never anticipated.

They failed to recognize their son in the splendid gentleman and would never have taken the lovely lady in her smart dress for their daughter-in-law. They were hurrying on without speaking to meet their child, not bothering about gentry travelling in carriages.

They had already passed when Georges hailed them with a laugh: "Top o' the morning, Papa Duroy."

Both pulled up short, astounded. The old woman spoke first. "It can't be you," she faltered.

"Certainly it is. It's little Georges," he answered, and,

running to her, kissed her on both cheeks, the hearty kiss of a son. Then he did the same to his father who had doffed his hat, the very tall black silk-peaked hat peculiar to Rouen, like a butcher's head dress.

"This is my wife," announced Georges, and they peered at Madeleine, as one examines a phenomenon with uneasy apprehension mingled with a kind of sneaking approval on the father's side, and jealous dislike on the mother's. The man whose natural joviality was reinforced by that born of sweet cider and brandy, grew bolder and with a mischievous wink, demanded a kiss. "Why not?" his son answered and Madeleine, very uncomfortable, tendered both cheeks to the peasant's slightly liquid salute, immediately after which he wiped his lips with the back of his hand.

The old woman, too, kissed her son's wife but with unfriendly reserve. No, this was not the daughter-in-law of her dreams, this was no plump, fresh farm hand, red as an apple and round as a brood mare. She looked more like a trollop, this fine lady with her fineries and her smell. For all perfumes were to the old woman simply a smell.

They started walking behind the cab, which went on with the luggage.

The old man took his son by the arm, and, keeping him in the rear, asked with interest:

"Tell me, how are you getting on in the world?"

"Very well indeed."

"I'm glad to hear that. What about your wife, is she well off?"

"Forty thousand francs."

The father gave a prolonged whistle of admiration and was so much overcome by the amount that he kept muttering for some time in an awestricken way to himself. Then he said with great conviction: "There's no denying she's a fine figure of a woman." For the old man found Madeleine to his taste; and in his day he had passed for a connoisseur of women.

Madeleine and the mother walked along together, without exchanging a word, till the two men joined them again.

They reached the village, a mere roadside hamlet, consisting of ten cottages on each side of the road, a few of brick, the rest mud huts, some slate-tiled, the majority thatched. Father Duroy's beershop "The Good Prospect," a paltry little hutment with a ground floor and a loft was at the beginning of the row on the left. A pine branch, fastened over the door indicated, in traditional country fashion, that thirsty souls were welcome.

Lunch was laid in the dining room of the inn, on two old tables pushed together, and covered with two table cloths. A neighbour, pressed in to help, curtsied reverentially at the sight of a great lady guest and then recognized Georges. "Good Lord!" she said. "It can't be our little imp!" to which he answered cheerfully, "Yes it is, Brulin dear," and kissed her as heartily as he had his father and mother.

He turned to his wife. "Let's go into our room. You can take off your hat." They went into a cold brick-tiled room, by a door on the right, with limed walls, and his bed covered with a cotton blanket. There was a crucifix over a holy water basin, with two coloured prints presenting Paul and Virginia under a very blue palm tree, and Napoleon the Great on a yellow horse, the sole ornaments in the dull depressing room.

As soon as they were alone he took Madeleine in his arms.

"D'you know Made, I'm glad I came? When I'm in Paris I never give the old people a thought, yet when I come back it's a joy, somehow."

But his father was banging on the flimsy partition with his fist. "Come on, come on, the soup's ready." And in they had to go.

It was the long drawn out meal of the country, a whole lot of badly assorted courses, pigs' chitterlings following a leg of mutton, and an omelette the chitterlings.

Father Duroy, livened up by cider and copious draughts of wine, launched forth on his stock stories, those he kept for high days and holidays, broad clumsy anecdotes about his friends. Georges knew everyone of them by heart, but laughed dutifully, stimulated by his native air, gripped by his innate love of the countryside, rediscovered memories, old

sights reviewed, tiny things like a cut in the door, a broken chair recalling some boyhood event, the smell of the soil, the sighing of the trees in the nearby forest, the spell of the little stream, the cattle, of home.

Mother Duroy said nothing; stern and aloof the whole time, she eyed her daughter-in-law with growing aversion in her heart, that hatred of the old working woman, the old yokel with fingers worn and limbs deformed by ceaseless toil, for this bright city wife, the type of everything she disapproved of and condemned, this fast hussy made for sloth and sin.

Madeleine ate scarcely anything, hardly spoke, sitting still, with her customary smile on her lips, but it was a fixed smile now, sorrowful, wistful, resigned. She felt frustrated and thwarted somehow. But why should she? She had wanted to come. She had known quite well that she was visiting country yokels, humble villagers. The reason was, she had been idealizing them. She, who never dreamed, had been dreaming.

"Was that it?" she asked herself. Do women always long for everything except what actually is? Had they seemed more poetic from afar off? No, but a little more articulate perhaps, a little less uncouth, a little kinder, more affectionate, a little more picturesque. Certainly she had never wanted them to be distinguished like two figures of romance. Why was it then that they chafed and irritated her by a hundred mean invisible little trifles, by continual indefinable grossness, by their very country nature, by what they said, by their gestures, even by their merriment?

She recalled her own mother, of whom she never spoke to a living soul, a governess educated at Saint-Denis, seduced, dead of misery and grief when Madeleine was twelve. An unknown stranger had made himself responsible for the little girl's upbringing. Her father doubtless. Who was he? She had no exact knowledge, though she might have dim suspicions.

The lunch went interminably on. Customers began to trickle in now, shaking hands with Father Duroy, exclaiming at the sight of his son, looking covertly at his wife with sly

winks. "Sacré matin! He's got hold of a lovely piece for a wife, has Georges Duroy."

Others, less intimate, sat down at the wooden tables, rasping out: A pint!—A chop!—Two beers!—A rum! They began to play domino, noisily rattling the little wooden discs.

Mother Duroy was coming and going ceaselessly, serving the customers in her cheerless way, taking the money, wiping the tables with the corner of her blue apron.

The smoke of clay pipes and farthing cigars began to fill the room. Madeleine started coughing and asked: "Shall we go out? I can't stand this."

Old Duroy didn't like the suggestion; lunch was not over. At length Madeleine got up and left them, sitting on a chair on the road-side by the door and waited till her father-in-law and husband had finished their coffee and brandies.

Georges rejoined her presently: "Would you like a row on the river?" he asked her.

She assented joyfully: "Oh! yes, do let us."

They walked down the mountainside and hired a boat at Croisset, passing the rest of the afternoon alongside a tiny islet under the willows, both dozing in the soft spring air, lulled by the little wavelets of the river. They returned at nightfall.

The evening meal by the light of a candle was even more depressing to Madeleine than the morning one. Father Duroy who was half tipsy, hardly spoke at all. The mother maintained her gloomy reserve.

The miserable light threw on the grey walls shadows of heads with enormous noses and outlandish gestures. Sometimes one saw a giant hand raise a fork the size of a garden rake towards a mouth which opened like a monster's jaws, when any of them turning round a little presented a profile to the yellow flickering flame.

Dinner was over at last, and Madeleine pulled her husband outside, not to stay a minute longer in the dismal room with its perpetual foul smell of old pipes and spilled liquor.

"It's boring you already. Isn't it?" he asked her, as soon as they were outside. She tried to deny it: "No." He insisted,

"I've noticed it. Say the word and we'll leave to-morrow."

She murmured: "Yes. I would like to."

Everything was very still. It was a warm night and as the deep caressing shadows fell, it seemed full of faint sounds, rustlings, whispers. They had come to a narrow forest path, under very tall trees between two impenetrably black coppices.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"In the forest."

"Is it big?"

"Very. The largest in France, they say."

The smell of earth, trees, moss, all the freshness and decay of the thick forest made up of shooting buds and stagnant weeds, of green verdure and mouldy jungle seemed to dwell there.

Raising her head, Madeleine saw the hosts of stars above the tree tops and although no breeze stirred the branches, she felt around her the weird fluttering of an ocean of leaves.

A strange shiver passed through her mind and agitated her body; vague anguish wrung her heart. Why? She could not understand it. But it seemed to her that she was lost, overwhelmed, set in the midst of fearful danger, abandoned by all, solitary, alone in the world, buried in this living tomb, trembling, shaking everywhere.

She murmured: "I'm a little frightened. I would like to go back."

"All right. Let's go."

"And...shall we return to Paris to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"To-morrow morning?"

"To-morrow morning, if you like."

They went back. The old people had gone to bed. She slept badly, disturbed all night by the noises, new to her, of the countryside, the strident screams of the screech owls, the grunting of a pig in its shed against the wall, a cock starting his crowing from mid-night.

She was up and ready to leave at the first flush of dawn.

When Georges told his parents they were leaving, they sat still, and then both of them understood from whom the decision

had emanated.

The father asked simply: "Shall I be seeing you again?"

"Yes, of course. During the summer."

"That's all right then."

The old woman growled: "I only hope you won't regret what you have done."

Going down the hill, Duroy began laughing.

"Well," he said, "I warned you. I had no desire to introduce you to Monsieur and Madame du Roy de Cantel, father and mother."

She laughed too, and answered: "I am delighted to have seen them. They are good souls and I shall often think of them in the whirl of Paris. I have begun to love them."

She added pensively: "Du Roy de Cantel...You'll find that no one will be surprised at our visiting cards. We shall tell everyone we have passed a week on your parents' estate," and drawing close to him she breathed a kiss on his cheek. "Happy days, Geo."

His arm went round her. "Happy days, Made."

Far below, down in the valley they saw the silver ribbon of the river rolling along under the morning sun, the factory chimneys belching their black clouds into the sky and all the sharp steeples standing sentinel over the ancient city.

CHAPTER II

THE DU ROYS had been back in Paris two days and the journalist had resumed his old post temporarily, prior to giving up the news service and definitely taking over Forestier's responsibilities and devoting himself exclusively to the political side.

That evening he light-heartedly ran up the stairs of his predecessor's flat to take his wife in his arms. He was cheerfully submitting to her physical allure and quiet, almost imperceptible, domination. Passing a florist's at the end of the Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, he thought of buying Madeleine a bouquet and took a large bunch of lovely fresh roses just blossoming, a cluster of perfumed buds.

At every floor on the staircase he gave a complacent glance at himself in the glass, that mirror which invariably brought back to his mind his first visit to the house.

He rang the bell, having forgotten his key, and the same servant opened the door whom he had kept on, on his wife's advice.

"Madame has returned?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

In the dining room he was surprised to see three covers laid, and the drawing room curtain being raised he saw Madeleine arranging in a vase on the mantel-shelf a bunch of roses the exact duplicate of his own. He was exasperated and aggrieved, as if someone had stolen his idea, his compliment and all the happiness he expected from it.

Coming in, he asked: "You've invited someone?"

She went on arranging the flowers and answered without turning round. "Yes and no. It's my old friend the Count de Vaudrec. He generally dines here on Mondays and is coming as usual."

Georges mumbled: "I see."

He was standing behind her, his bouquet in his hand, with the desire to hide it, to throw it away. But all he said was: "Look I've brought you some roses."

She turned round quickly, full of smiles.

"Ah! How sweet of you to have thought of it," and she held out her arms to him offering her lips with such unassumed delight that he felt himself mollified at once.

She took the flowers and breathed in their perfume, then with the brightness of a pleased child, put them in the other empty vase facing the first one. She examined the effect and murmured:

"There! I'm satisfied. Now I have my mantelpiece properly adorned."

Presently she added with an air of conviction:

"You know, he's a charming man, Vaudrec, you will be friends at once."

A ring announced the count. He came in, tranquil, very much at his ease, like one in his own home. After gallantly kissing the young woman's fingers he turned and cordially shook hands with her husband: "I hope you are well, my dear du Roy."

He had no longer that formal manner, that stiff reserve, but was pleasantly affable as if he realized that the position was no longer the same. The journalist, surprised at the change, went out of his way to reciprocate his advances. After five minutes one would have thought that they had known and admired one another for ten years.

Madeleine's face was radiant. She said: "I'm going to leave you together. I must have a look in my kitchen," and she left the room, followed by the looks of both men.

When she returned she found them discussing the theatre and the latest play with lively harmony and a unity of outlook which was speedily developing into friendship.

It was a delightful dinner, intimate and homely, and the count prolonged his stay, feeling himself welcome in this happy new household.

After his departure, Madeleine said to her husband:

"Isn't he just perfect? And he's so celebrated. Above all, a real friend, reliable, devoted, faithful. Ah! without him..."

She didn't pursue this train of thought and Georges replied:

"Yes, I find him very decent. I think we shall get on very

well together."

She went on briskly: "You won't like it but there's work to be done before we go to bed. I didn't have time to tell you about it before dinner because Vaudrec came too early. But I've been told some grave news, very grave indeed, news from Morocco. I got it from Laroche-Mathieu the deputy and minister-to-be. We shall have to make a first class article out of it, one that will cause a sensation. I've got all the facts and figures. We'll settle down to it now. Come on, take the lamp."

He obeyed her and they went into the study.

The same books lined the shelves of the bookcase, on the top of which now reposed the three vases bought by Forestier at Saint Juan on the eve of his last day on earth. Under the table the dead man's foot-warmer awaited the feet of du Roy who, sitting down took up the same ivory penholder, a little frayed at the end of his predecessor's nibbling at it. Madeleine leaned against the chimney-piece and, lighting a cigarette, told him her news and then expatiated on it with her ideas and the scheme of the kind of article she wanted.

He listened attentively, jotting down notes, and when she had finished, advanced his own ideas, went over the whole matter again, exaggerated here and there and developed what was no longer the mere plan of an article but an actual plan of campaign against the minister himself. This attack was to be the beginning.

Her cigarette went out, she was so interested, her keen mind leaping ahead and roaming far and wide following and advancing beyond Georges' idea.

From time to time she commented: "Yes...yes...that's first rate...excellent...that's very effective."

At the end of it she said: "Now, let's get it written."

But he was baffled as usual and groped for words in vain. She came across softly and leaning over his shoulder began to whisper phrases and sentences into his ear.

"Is that exactly what you intend to say?" she would ask and he would answer: "Yes, the very thing."

She possessed a biting sarcastic wit, a malignant feminine

irony which assailed the unfortunate statesman not only politically but personally, and she drove the attack home with a dry humour which would raise a laugh of ridicule while at the same time impressing the reader with its truth.

Du Roy put in an occasional line or two of his own which had the effect of making the attack more weighty and less superficial. He had the knack of sly suggestion, of false innuendo, developed by sharpening up his news items, and when Madeleine stated anything to him as a fact which appeared to him doubtful or libellous, he excelled in hinting at it, in a way which would impress the mind more powerfully than if he had actually asserted it.

The article finished, Georges read it over aloud. Both considered it very powerful and they beamed on one another, delighted and surprised at this self-revelation the one to the other. Their eyes met full of admiration and hope, and as they embraced, this intellectual ardour became a physical one.

Du Roy took up the lamp again. "And now, darling?" he asked, his eyes bright; and she answered: "Lead on, my master, since you are lighting the way."

He led the way into their room and she followed him tickling his neck with the tips of her fingers to make him hurry, between the collar and his hair. It was a little trick of hers, this particular tickling and he could never stay still under it.

The article appeared over the signature of Georges du Roy de Cantel and created a tremendous sensation. It was referred to in the Chamber. 'Daddy' Walter congratulated the author and made him political editor of the *Vie Française*, his old post reverting to Boisrenard. Then began in the paper a skilful violent campaign against the Minister for Foreign Affairs. The attack, invariably circumstantial and supported by facts, sometimes ironic, sometimes serious, broadly comic occasionally but usually maliciously venomous, struck with a deadly sureness which surprised everyone. Rival papers began to quote the *Vie Française*, extracting whole paragraphs, and those in power were inquiring whether they could gag this unknown implacable foe, with the bribe of a préfecture.

Du Roy was becoming famous in political circles. He sensed his growing importance in conciliatory gestures, handshakings, doffed hats; and, more and more his wife filled him with a wondering admiration at her ingenuity and resourcefulness, the uncanny skill with which she ferreted out information, and the number of her acquaintances.

At any moment he would find in his drawing room, a senator, a deputy, a judge or a general and they all treated Madeleine with solemn familiarity. "Where had she met all these people?" "Socially," she told him. "But how had she managed to capture their confidence, trust and affection?" He could not fathom it.

"She would make a first class diplomat," he thought.

Often she came in late for meals, out of breath, flushed, trembling, and without waiting to lift her veil would burst out with: "I've got a scoop for to-morrow. 'What d'you think, the Minister of Justice has appointed two judges who were involved in the mixed commission scandal! We're going to launch a barrage on them they'll remember."

And they would launch their barrage on the minister and follow it up day after day. Laroche-Mathieu, the deputy who dined with them on Tuesdays, after they had begun the week with the Count de Vaudrec, would shake hands vigorously with them both, spluttering with delight. "Good God!" he would proclaim, "what a show-down! After this we can't help winning." He had been angling after the portfolio of Foreign Affairs and now saw himself getting it.

This man Laroche-Mathieu was a political Mr. Facing-both-ways, a provincial solicitor, impecunious, with no convictions, no courage, no principles and no brains, a small town boss, slyly sitting on the fence midway between the two extremes, a sort of political Jesuit, of shady character, one of those democratic mushrooms who spring up by the hundred on the popular dunghheap of universal suffrage.

His native village cunning enabled him to pass for a strong man amongst his colleagues, that collection of riff-raff, outsiders and failures from whom we select our members of parliament. He was just sharp enough, cautious enough, familiar

enough, pleasant enough, to get on. In short, Laroche-Mathieu was working his way up in the world, the mixed, dirty, foul, stupid world of political big wigs.

Everyone was saying of him "Laroche will be a minister" and no one believed more enthusiastically that Laroche would be a minister than that same Laroche.

He was one of the principal share-holders in Daddy Walter's paper and his colleague and partner in many a financial deal.

Du Roy supported him confidently and with indefinite hopes for himself in the future. In doing this he was only carrying on the work which Forestier had begun. Laroche-Mathieu had promised Forestier to get him the Cross of the Legion of Honour when his own hour of triumph sounded. The decoration now would adorn the breast of Madeleine's new husband. That was all. Nothing was changed.

It was, indeed, so obvious that this was so, that his colleagues on the paper began to take it up in a way that intensely irritated him.

Nowadays they addressed him only as Forestier.

As soon as he came into the office someone would call out: "Good morning, Forestier." He would pretend not to hear and would sort out his letters. But the voice would pipe out again more loudly: "How goes it Forestier?"

As du Roy made for the Director's sanctum, the man who had spoken would stop him, with some such remark as: "Oh! sorry; it's you I want to speak to. So stupid of me, but I'm always mixing you up with poor Charles. It's because your articles are so exactly like his were. All of us get muddled by it."

Du Roy rarely answered but he fumed inwardly; and a sullen anger was bred within him against the dead man.

Even Daddy Walter himself had proclaimed that everyone was amazed at the identical qualities of style and inspiration which characterized the contributions of the new political editor, compared with those of his predecessor. "Yes," he would say, "it is Forestier himself, but a better informed, more virile Forestier."

Another time, happening to open the cupboard in which the

bilboquets were kept du Roy found those belonging to his predecessor with crêpe bands round their handles while his own, which he had used when he was working under Saint-Potin, were adorned with pink favours. They had all been set out on the same shelf according to size and a placard, such as one sees in museums, had been inscribed on it. "Ancient collection. Forestier and Co. Successor, Forestier-du Roy. Everlasting Articles. Useful in any conditions." He calmly shut the cupboard saying loudly: "There are idiots and jealous cads everywhere."

But his pride was hurt, and his vanity, that suspicious vanity, that readiness to take offence which is the heritage of the literary man from the most junior reporter to the greatest poet.

That word *Forestier* lacerated his ear; he dreaded hearing it, and felt himself reddening when he did. The name was a bitter jest to him, more than that, almost an insult. It cried aloud to him: "It is your wife who does the work, just as she did the other man's. Without her you would be nothing."

He acknowledged freely that Forestier had been nothing without Madeleine; but surely it couldn't be true of himself as well!

At home, the obsession persisted. Now the whole house recalled the dead man, the furniture, nick-nacks, everything he touched. He had never given a thought to it before. But the joke played on him by his colleagues had become a sore, festering in his mind, fed and nurtured by a host of trifles, hitherto unnoticed.

He could no longer touch any article without the immediate feeling that he saw Charles' hand on it. Looking around him he saw not a thing that the other man had not purchased, used, cherished, owned. More than all this Georges began to fret and worry about the former relationship between his friend and his wife.

Often he was himself astonished at this mental turmoil and could not understand it. He asked himself: "What the devil ails me? I'm not jealous of Madeleine's friends. I don't worry myself at anything she does. She comes and goes just

as she likes. Yet the mere recollection of that brute Charles infuriates me."

Ceaselessly he told himself: "How such a woman could have tolerated an animal like him for a single moment passes my comprehension."

His sour rancour increased day by day, magnified by trifles like pin-pricks, by the constant thought of the dead man after a talk with Madeleine, a word with the servant, or even the chambermaid. Du Roy was fond of sweet dishes and one evening he asked: "Why don't we have any sweets? You never put them on."

The young woman answered equably: "You're quite right. I don't think of it. Charles disliked them..."

He banged his fist on the table with uncontrollable exasperation.

"So that's it! D'you know Charles is getting on my nerves? It's Charles here, Charles there, Charles everywhere. Charles would like this, Charles loved that. Can't you let him rest? Surely he's dead enough!"

Madeleine looked at him, quite taken aback. She couldn't understand such an outburst. Then, with her quick intelligence she guessed what was passing through his mind, the slow work of posthumous jealousy, swollen every second by everything that recalled the other man. She thought it rather childish of him but she was flattered by it and made no reply.

He longed to get rid of this jealousy he could not conceal. But the same evening it broke out again. They were working on an article after dinner and his foot got entangled in the foot-warmer. He kicked it aside impatiently saying half jokingly:

"Did Charles always have cold feet?"

She answered pleasantly: "Oh! he lived in terror of colds. He had a weak chest you know."

Du Roy replied cruelly: "By Gad, he proved that right enough," and then added gallantly, kissing her hand, "happily for me."

He couldn't keep off the subject. That night in bed he found himself asking: "Did Charles wear night caps to keep

out the cold?"

She took it as a joke and answered: "Not a night cap, only a warm band round the temples."

Georges shrugged his shoulders saying with the air of a better man:

"What a weakling!"

From that time Charles was mixed up in his conversation continually; it was an obsession. He couldn't help himself; and he always referred to him as "that poor Charles" with condescending pity.

Back in the office where, two or three times every day, he heard himself being referred to as "Forestier" he avenged himself by following the dead man with spiteful mockery into his tomb. He recalled his faults, his follies, his little weaknesses, going over them complacently one by one, developing and enlarging them as if he had to struggle in his wife's heart against a formidable rival.

Several times he asked her: "Tell me, Madeleine, do you remember that time when that fat gherkin of a Forestier tried to prove to us that stout men were more virile than thin ones?"

Then he wanted her to tell him a host of intimate secret marital details about the dead man and when Madeleine, constrained and uncomfortable, refused to answer he obstinately persisted.

"Come, do tell me. He must have been a comical sight in moments like that."

Ill at ease she murmured: "Come now Georges, stop it. Be quiet. Those days are finished now."

But he would not: "No, tell me! I'll swear he must have been a clumsy lout in bed, that animal!"

And he always finished with the remark: "What a pig he was."

One evening towards the end of June he was smoking a cigarette at the open window and the overpowering heat suggested a drive.

"My little Made," he asked her, "shall we take a turn as far as the Bois?"

She agreed and they took an open cab through the Champs-Élysées and down the avenue of the Bois-de-Boulogne. It was a still night, one of those stifling evenings when the enervating air of Paris chokes the lungs like fumes from a furnace. An army of vehicles carried countless lovers to the shelter of the trees, one cab behind the other, an endless procession.

Georges and Madeleine amused themselves looking at these innumerable couples, all arm in arm, the women in bright array, the men in sober garb, a vast river of lovers flowing towards the Bois under the scorching starry sky. There was not a sound but the monotonous rattle of wheels on the road. Interminably they passed and passed, two occupants to every carriage, sprawled back on the cushions, silent, hugging close to each other, lost in a maze of desire, trembling with anticipation of consummation to be. The warm shadows seemed full of kisses. A feeling of wafted sensuousness, of animal lust was everywhere, making the air heavy and suffocating. All these yoked couples intoxicated with the same thought, the same heat, filled the atmosphere around them with fever; the carriages, charged with love, over which caresses seemed to hover, breathed out, on their way, a kind of sensual, subtle, distracting whisper.

The contagion of it all began to affect Georges and Madeleine. Without a word spoken, their hands met softly. They were both a little oppressed by the stifling heat and this all-prevailing languor.

At the turning by the fortifications they instinctively turned to one another in close embrace and Madeleine, not as self-possessed as usual, murmured rather confusedly: "We are just the same pair of madcaps that we were in Rouen."

"Oh! my little Made," he answered, and pressed her to him.

She said: "Do you remember the forest at your home, how sinister it was? It seemed full of frightful beasts to me and to have no end. But here it's lovely. One feels kisses in the air and I know that Sèvres is on the other side of the wood."

He answered: "Oh! in my home forest there are only deer,

foxes, hares, a few wild boar, with, here and there, a forester's hut."

That word, the name of the dead man, shocked him as powerfully as if someone had shouted it from the depths of the wood. It numbed him and he was again in the grip of that strange persistent obsession, that jealous gnawing unconquerable anger which had been marring his recent life. After a pause he asked: "Did you often come here in the evenings with Charles?"

"Oh yes, very often."

Quite suddenly, he felt he must go home, an urgent, imperative, depressed desire. But the image of Forestier had entered his mind again, possessing it, monopolizing it, so that he could neither think nor speak of anything but him.

With malicious accent he questioned her.

"Tell me something, Made?"

"What, dear?"

"Were you ever unfaithful to poor Charles?"

She answered disdainfully: "You are becoming objectionable and vulgar."

But he would not leave the subject.

"Now, come my little Made, you may as well be frank. Own up. You were unfaithful to him. You did make a cuckold of him, didn't you?"

She was silent, disgusted as all women are by that word.

Obstinately he persisted: "Sacristi, if anyone was made for that part he was. Oh! yes. Oh! yes. It would amuse me like anything to know if he was a cuckold. God! what a cod's head he was!"

He saw that she was smiling now, at some remembrance perhaps.

"Come on, tell me. What does it matter anyway? It would be really funny to own to me, that you deceived him, to admit it to me."

He was actually trembling with the hope and desire that Charles, the odious Charles, the detestable dead man, the cursed corpse should have undergone this shameful humiliation. And besides...besides another emotion more confused

was stimulating his desire to find out.

"Made, my little Made, I beg you, do please tell me. No one would blame you; you would have been a fool not to. Now, come, own up."

There was no doubt this insistence was amusing her now. She was laughing; sharp staccato merry little laughs.

He brought his lips quite close to her ear: "Come... Come... admit it."

She drew away with an irritated movement and answered sharply:

"How stupid you are! Does one reply to questions of that kind?"

She had said this in such a peculiar tone that a cold shiver ran through her husband. He sat aghast, stricken, breathless, as one who has sustained an overwhelming moral shock.

They were driving by the side of the lake now, on which the sky seemed to have shed its stars. Two swans were gliding slowly along, hardly visible in the dusk. Georges called out to the coachman: "Go back," and the carriage turned round crossing the others whose huge lamps shone like eyes in the night of the Bois.

"Why had she spoken in that strange manner?" he asked himself. "Was it an admission?" and the practical certainty that she had deceived her first husband, filled her present one with rage. He wanted to beat her, to tear her hair out, to strangle her.

If only she had answered: "Dearest, don't you know that if I had wanted to betray him, it would have been with you that I would have done it?" How he would have taken her to his arms, loved her, worshipped her!

He sat quite still, eyes to the sky, arms crossed, his mind too shocked even to think. All he could feel was that rancour, that fury fermenting and growing within him that devours the hearts of all males made victims to the vagaries of feminine lust. For the first time he was undergoing the poignant, confused agony of the husband who suspects! He was jealous, yes jealous on a dead man's behalf, jealous for Forestier! Jealous in a weird, hurt fashion, into which suddenly hatred

against Madeleine began to enter.

Then, by slow degrees, an artificial calm took its place and thrusting his grief aside he thought: "All women are the same. One must make use of them and never give them anything of oneself."

The bitter sorrow in his heart mounted to his lips in words of malice and disgust. But he didn't let a single one escape. He kept muttering to himself: "The world is to the strong. I must be strong. That's the one vital thing."

The carriage put on speed. They were passing the fortifications again. Du Roy saw before him the red glow in the sky like the flames of a huge forge; and he heard a confused, vast, continual roar made up of numberless different sounds, a dull volume of noise near and afar off, the whisper of Paris breathing, on this summer night, like a Colossus weary with labour.

Georges reflected: "I should be a fool to make myself ill over this. Each for himself. Victory goes to the bold. Egotism is life; life is egotism. And egotism for fame and fortune is worth more than egotism for wife and love."

The Arc de Triomphe de l'Étoile sprang into view at the city's entrance, on its two monstrous legs, like a clumsy giant about to start walking down the wide open avenue before it.

Georges and Madeleine found themselves once again in one of the long line of carriages, bringing home, to the longed for bed, the eternal couple, silent and interlocked; it seemed as if the whole human race was gliding alongside bemused with joy, love and goodwill.

The young wife who had guessed something of what was passing through her husband's mind said to him gently: "What are you dreaming about dear? For half-an-hour you haven't spoken a word."

He laughed and answered: "I was thinking of all these cuddling imbeciles and saying to myself that there are other things to do in life."

She murmured: "Yes...but it's nice sometimes...it's nice...nice...when one has nothing better to do."

Georges' thoughts were a medley of spiteful rage, stripping

life of its cloak of poesy:

"I should be a fool to let all this worry me, to let it deprive me of anything, to put myself out, plague myself, work myself up as I have been doing for some time." The vision of Forestier crossed his mind now without raising any exasperation. It seemed to him as though they had become reconciled and made friends again. He felt like crying out "Good luck old chap."

Madeleine was bored by his silence. She said: "Shall we have an ice at Tortoni's before we go in?"

He looked at her from his corner. Her beautiful blonde profile showed clearly against the bright light of a café-chautant. He reflected: "Yes, she is lovely. That's fine. To a good cat a good rat, my comrade. But the next time I torment myself on your account it will be hot at the North Pole." Then he added aloud: "Certainly my darling," and, so that she should guess nothing, he kissed her.

It seemed to Madeleine that her husband's lips were like ice.

But she gave him her usual smile as she took his hand to alight.

CHAPTER III

ON reaching the office the next morning du Roy sought out Boisrenard. "My dear friend," said he, "I want your assistance again. For some time past it has been thought witty to call me Forestier. I begin to find this a bore. Will you have the goodness to inform our colleagues, that I will knock down the next one of them that indulges in this little joke. It will be for them to consider whether their hobby is worth the price of a duel. I am putting the matter in your hands because you are a level-headed fellow who can stop it before it goes to extremes and also because you were my second in the other affair."

Boisrenard undertook the mission.

Du Roy went out on his assignments, returning an hour later.

Not a soul called him Forestier.

Returning home he heard women's voices in the drawing room. He asked who was there and the maid replied: "Mme Walter and Mme de Marelle." His heart missed a beat, then he told himself: "Now for it!" and opened the door.

Clotilde was in a corner near the fireplace, caught by a sunbeam from the window. It seemed to Georges that she went a little pale when she saw him. After first greeting Mme Walter with her two daughters at her side, like a couple of sentries guarding her, he turned to his former mistress. She gave him her hand; he pressed it with meaning, as if saying: "I love you just the same." She returned the pressure.

He said: "I hope you've been well during the century that has slipped by since we last met."

She answered composedly: "Oh! yes, and you, Bel-Ami?" Then turning to Madeleine she added. "You permit me to call him Bel-Ami still?"

"Certainly dear, I permit you whatever you want."

A hint of irony seemed hidden in the words.

Mme Walter was alluding to a party Jacques Rival was

giving at his bachelor flat, a great fencing display at which ladies would assist; she was saying: "It will be so interesting. But I am worried. We have no one to escort us, my husband will be away."

Du Roy at once offered himself. She accepted. "We shall be very grateful, my daughters and I."

He was looking at the younger of the two girls and thinking: "She's not too bad, that little Suzanne, not at all bad."

She looked like a fragile blonde doll, very tiny but well formed, with graceful figure and hips, bright blue-grey eyes, very white smooth skin, charming, unaffected manners, and a happy lively way with her, for all the world like one of those porcelain dolls one sees in the arms of children hardly taller than their toy.

The elder sister, Rose, was dull, heavy, insignificant, one of those girls nobody notices, speaks to or remarks on.

The mother rose to go and turned to Georges: "I'm relying on you for next Thursday at two o'clock;" and he answered: "I shall be there, madame."

As soon as they had left Mme de Marelle rose too.

"Au revoir, Bel-Ami."

This time it was she who pressed his hand hard, and she held it for a long time. The silent avowal affected him and he felt a sudden yearning for this merry little Bohemian mad-cap; she was a good sort, he thought, and perhaps really loved him.

"I'll go and see her to-morrow," he promised himself.

Alone together Madeleine gave him an amused look and began to laugh; a frank hearty laugh.

"Do you realize that Mme Walter has fallen for you?"

"Nonsense;" he said incredulously.

"But, I'm telling you there's no doubt about it. She's been talking about you to me. She's most keen on you,—quite silly about it. She said she wished she could find two husbands like you for her daughters!... Fortunately, with her, matters of that kind don't count."

He couldn't make out her drift: "What d'you mean 'don't count'?"

She answered with the conviction of a woman sure of her ground: "Well, Mme Walter is one of those women you never hear a whisper of scandal about, not a syllable, never, never. She is absolutely impregnable. Her husband,—well, you know what he is. But she,...she is another proposition. She has had to put up with a lot through marrying a Jew but she has remained faithful to him. She's a straight woman."

Du Roy was surprised: "But I always thought she was a Jewess too."

"She? Not at all. She is the Lady Patron of all the Catholic charities of la Madeleine. She was even married in church. I don't know whether he went through a formal baptism, or whether the Church closed its eyes to it."

Georges murmured reflectively: "Well, well...then...you mean she really has taken to me?"

"Positively and completely. If you were not already booked I would have advised you to ask for the hand of... of Suzanne I s'pose; you wouldn't like Rose."

He answered tugging his moustache: "What about the mother? The rats haven't got at her yet."

Madeleine shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"I've told you about the mother, my little boy, and I know what I'm talking about. Anyway I'm not afraid. Women don't go wrong for the first time at her age. One has to begin earlier."

Georges was thinking: "If what she says is true...why I might have married Suzanne?..."

He dismissed the thought: "Bah!...it's rubbish...the father would never have accepted me."

None the less he determined, from now, to watch Mme Walter's attitude towards him carefully and see whether he could turn it to his own advantage.

Directly after lunch the next afternoon he made for the rue de Verneuil. The same maid opened the door and in the familiar fashion of servants of the middle classes asked him: "Everything all right monsieur?" and he answered: "Yes, thank you, my child."

In the drawing room, a faulty hand was running over scales

on the piano. It was Laurine. He thought she would leap into his arms; but she rose solemnly, greeted him with ceremonious formality as she would have a great personage and then withdrew, tremendously dignified.

Her demeanour was so obviously that of offended womanhood that he was astounded. Her mother came in and he kissed her hands.

"How often you have been in my thoughts," he said.

"And you in mine," was her answer.

"My darling little, Clo, I love you."

"And, I love you."

"Have you...have you missed me at all?"

"Yes and no. It hurt me a lot at first but I soon understood your reason and I told myself: 'Just wait. He will come back sooner or later!'"

"I didn't dare come back. I didn't know how you would receive me; I didn't dare but I wanted to all the time. By the way what's the matter with Laurine? She would hardly speak to me and went out perfectly furious."

"I really don't know. We can't mention your name to her since your marriage. My candid opinion is she's jealous."

"Good Heavens!"

"It's a fact. She doesn't call you Bel-Ami any more; she actually refers to you as M Forestier."

Du Roy flushed; then he drew near her.

"Kiss me."

She gave him her lips.

"Where shall we be able to meet?" he asked.

"Why...the rue de Constantinople, of course."

"Ah!...The rooms have not been let then?"

"No...I have kept them on."

"Kept them on?"

"Yes, I felt that you would return."

A gust of proud happiness shook him. So she did love him, truly, faithfully, deeply.

He whispered: "I adore you," then asked: "Your husband, —how is he?"

"Very well indeed. He's just spent a month here; he left

the day before yesterday."

Du Roy laughed loudly: "That's very convenient."

She answered naïvely: "Yes, it's really quite nice. But he is never in the way even when he's here. You know that?"

"That's true. I like him. He's a charming man."

"And you," she asked, "how do you like your new life?"

"Middling. My wife is a colleague, a partner."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing more...as regards love..."

"I quite understand. All the same she is very lovely."

"Yes, but she doesn't bother me."

He drew nearer to her: "When shall we meet?"

"Well...to-morrow...if you want to."

"At what time? Two o'clock?"

"Yes, two o'clock."

He rose to go saying rather awkwardly:

"You know, I intend to take over the flat in the rue de Constantinople myself. I must. It's not right that you should go on paying for it."

It was she, now, who kissed his hands with an adoring gesture, murmuring: "You shall do as you like. It's enough for me to know that I kept it on for our reunion," and du Roy left, his heart glowing with satisfaction.

Passing a photographer's shop the portrait of a tall woman with large eyes reminded him of Mme Walter. "It's very like her," he thought, "and she really isn't at all unattractive. I wonder I've never noticed that before. I'm quite keen on seeing what she will be like on Thursday."

He rubbed his hands together, striding along, filled with secret joy, the joy of success in all its forms, the egotistical joy of the astute man who succeeds, the subtle pleasure comprised of gratified vanity and satisfied desire that is conferred on us by the favours of women.

On Thursday he said to Madeleine: "You are not coming to the Assault-at-Arms at Rival's?"

"Oh! no thanks. That sort of thing bores me rather. I shall go to the Chamber of Deputies."

Punctual to the exact minute, he called for Mme Walter in

an open cab. Her appearance quite surprised him, she looked so young and pretty. She had on a bright frock, the low corsage of which showed the rise and fall of her large breasts. Never before had she seemed so fresh and attractive. With her calm assured composed poise and a certain tranquil matronly allure, he judged her really desirable. There was nothing daring or provocative in her conversation. She said the usual things about the usual subjects, was restrained and moderate, and her ideas were methodical, well ordered and full of common sense, as of one who disliked excess of any kind. Her daughter Suzanne, all in pink, looked like an exquisite Watteau miniature: her elder sister, like a governess in charge of this tiny ship of dainty girlhood.

A row of carriages was drawn up outside Rival's door. Du Roy gave his arm to Mme Walter and they went in.

The Assault was being given in aid of the orphans of the sixth ward of Paris under the patronage of all the wives of senators and deputies having any connection with *la Vie Française*.

Mme Walter had promised to be present with her daughters but had refused the title of Lady Patron because she lent her name only to charities undertaken by the clergy not only because she was extremely devout but because her marriage to an Israelite, in her own opinion rendered an emphatic religious deportment the more necessary on her side.

Every edition of the journal for the past three weeks had proclaimed:

"Our eminent colleague Jacques Rival has conceived the ingenious and generous idea for the benefit of the orphans of the sixth ward of Paris, of a grand Assault in the fine school of arms adjoining his house.

"The hostesses are Mmes Laloigne, Remontel, Rissolin, wives of the senators of that name and Mmes Laroche-Mathieu, Percerol and Firmin, wives of the well known deputies. A collection will be taken during the interval and the amount will be immediately handed to the mayor of the sixth ward or his representative."

It was a first class advertisement which the astute journalist

had contrived for himself, and his own benefit.

Jacques Rival received arrivals at the entrance to his house in which a buffet had been installed the expense of which was to be deducted from the offertory. He pointed out with a friendly hand the little staircase by which they were to go down to the cave where he had set up his fencing school and shooting gallery: "Below, ladies, below. The Assault will take place underground."

He hurried forward at sight of his director's wife, then shook hands with du Roy: "Hello! Bel-Ami."

The other was surprised: "Who told you that..."

Rival broke in with: "Mme Walter here present. She thinks the nickname very pretty."

Mme Walter blushed: "Yes, I admit that if I knew you better, I too, like little Laurine would call you Bel-Ami. It suits you very well." Du Roy laughed: "Well then Madame, please do it."

Her eyes fell: "No, we don't know one another well enough," and he said softly: "Dare I hope that we shall later on?"

"We'll see about that," she answered.

The way down to the cave was illuminated by gas light; and the sudden change from the clear light of day to the yellow glare had something dismal about it. A close earthy odour came up from below: a hot humid smell of damp mouldy walls dried for the occasion, mingled with feminine perfumes of Lubin, rose, iris and violet.

The whole cavern was lighted up by Venetian lanterns and gas garlands, hidden in the leaves and foliage, which concealed the damp stone walls. The ceiling was hung with ferns, and the floor covered with leaves and flowers, the effect of the whole being quite pleasing. In the little recess at the back, was a platform for the fencers, equipped with chairs for the judges. In the cave itself, were chairs in rows of ten; it could just about accommodate two hundred people; four hundred had accepted invitations. Practically all the chair accommodation was taken up by the ladies who came in, chattering with a great rustling of silks, fanning themselves as if they

were in a theatre. The packed audience was already finding the air uncomfortably stuffy. A wag called out from time to time: "Orange! lemonade! beer!"

Mme Walter and her daughters reached their seats in the first row, and du Roy having escorted them there was leaving them.

"I must leave you now, the seats are reserved for ladies."

Mme Walter hesitated and then objected:

"Never mind that. I want you to stay. You can point out the fencers to me. Look, if you sit on the edge of this seat you won't inconvenience anyone." She gazed at him with her large, soft eyes and insisted: "Now please do sit down... monsieur... monsieur Bel-Ami. We really need you;" and he complied: "I obey...with pleasure, Madame."

Everyone admired the cave. Georges well remembered it! He recalled the morning he had spent in it the day before his duel, alone, facing a little white cardboard target which stared at him from the second cave like a huge formidable eye.

The voice of Jacques Rival proclaimed from the staircase:

"We're going to begin, ladies;" and six gentlemen climbed on to the platform and sat in the chairs reserved for the jury; they were General de Reynoldi, president, a little man with a huge moustache; the painter Joséphin Roudet, a tall bald-headed man with a long beard; Matthéo de Ujar. Simon Ramoncel, Pierre de Carvin, three young society striplings. and Gaspard Merleon, a professional.

Two cards, one on each side of the cave, announced the names of the contestants.

The first bout was between two professionals, good second class men. Occasionally the word "Touché" was heard, and the gentlemen of the jury automatically inclined six expert heads. The unskilled audience saw nothing but a couple of living marionettes jumping around and waving their arms, clumsy and vaguely ridiculous..

The first two were succeeded by M Planton and Carapin, both professionals, one military, the other a civilian. M Planton was extraordinarily small and M Carapin extraordinarily fat. One thought that the first prick of a foil would

deflate this balloon like an elephant with skin of tissue paper. Everyone was laughing. M Planton leaped about like a monkey. M Carapin moved only his arms, the rest of his body being immobilized by fat: but with all his ponderosity he managed to defend himself the full five minutes and the judges' verdict, a draw was popular.

After a contest between an amateur and a professional the first part of the programme concluded with an extremely fine passage of arms between Jacques Rival and the celebrated Belgian professional Lebègue. Rival was the ladies' favourite. He was a really first class athlete, well made, supple, agile and far more graceful than any of those who had preceded him. He fenced with stylish elegance, a complete contrast to the skilled but more clumsy manner of his adversary. He was obviously perfectly trained and in first class condition. He was awarded the decision and everyone agreed with it.

For some little time a strange commotion from the upper floor had been disturbing the audience: a noisy stamping of feet and loud laughter. The two hundred guests who had been crowded out of the cave were amusing themselves in their own way. On the little spiral staircase fifty men were crammed together. The heat was becoming unbearable below. The same wag was yelping in sharp staccato barks: "Orange! Lemonade! Beer."

Rival appeared, flushed and still wearing his fencing costume.

"I'm going to fetch some refreshments," he said and made for the staircase. But communication was cut with the upper floor. He could as easily have pierced an exit through the ceiling as pass through the mass of humanity on the ground.

Rival shouted: "Pass along some ices for the ladies!"

Fifty voices took up the cry: "Tees!" Soon a tray appeared, but it was empty the contents having been purloined on their way.

A powerful voice complained: "It's suffocating here, let's finish up and get away." Someone said: "The collection" and the whole crowd, breathless but still cheerful, repeated: "The collection...collection...collection," and six ladies began to

move along the rows of seats followed by the sound of silver falling into boxes. Du Roy pointed out to Mme Walter the well known personalities. There were society men, journalists belonging to great dailies, long established organs which looked down on *la Vie Française* with a certain amount of contempt. They had seen so many of these politico-financial ventures, offsprings of an unsavoury alliance, die, wiped out by the collapse of a ministry. Painters and sculptors, sportsmen as they generally are, were there too, a poet academician, two famous musicians and a couple of noble foreigners.

Someone hailed du Roy with "Good day to you, my friend." It was the Count de Vaudrec. Excusing himself to the ladies du Roy turned to him and shook hands; and coming back he remarked: "He is a charming fellow, Vaudrec; in his company one feels breeding, ancestry."

Mme Walter made no reply. She was feeling a little tired and her breast was rising and falling quickly with the effort of breathing. Du Roy's eye fell on it and occasionally he met her glance, an uneasy, faltering glance lighting on him and turning quickly away. He said to himself: "Well!... Well!... Well!... It looks as if I have lifted that prize too!"

The lady collectors finished their task, their boxes full of gold and silver and a fresh placard was put on the stage announcing: "Grand Surprise." Two women appeared, foils in hand, dressed in black tights with very short kilts just covering a little of their thighs, their heads forcibly held high by fencing pads. They were pretty and young and smiled saucily in saluting the audience. Loud applause greeted them as they put themselves on guard amid gallant whispers, chuckled jests and tolerant smiles on the lips of the judges. This was the sort of display the public wanted and it gloated over, two fair combatants who inflamed the desire of the men and amongst the women awakened the natural inclination of the Paris public towards any acquisition a trifle on the suggestive side, any display verging on bad taste, the falsely-witty and the pseudo-graceful. Every time either of the girls attacking, bent forward stretching her limbs a thrill of pleasure ran through the spectators. When one of them exposed a posterior

to them, a very ample posterior, mouths opened and eyes glistened; at such moments it was not the wrist work they were admiring. The applause was frantic.

A sabre duel followed but no one paid the least attention to it, everyone wondering what was going on upstairs. For some minutes past there had been a tremendous clatter of moving furniture, being dragged along the floor as if it were a household removal; then, suddenly they heard the sound of a piano and the noise of feet moving in rhythm. Those upstairs had started a ball to make up for seeing nothing of the show below.

A laugh rang through the audience in the school of arms, then the ladies wanted to dance, and all interest in the fencing vanished in a hubbub of conversation. The idea of the dance, improvised by the latecomers, caught on, and everyone wanted to join them.

But two new combatants were saluting one another and these fell on guard with so much distinction and authority that the waning attention of the spectators was caught again; there was such elastic grace, trained strength, perfect co-ordination between mind and muscle, such sureness and masterly technique that even the ignorant crowd was surprised and delighted. They felt that they were being privileged to see something beautiful and rare, that two great artists were showing them the very limit of what was possible in the way of craft, science, and physical perfection. No one spoke now so concentrated was the attention. Then when they shook hands at the end there was a burst of real unaffected applause. Their names were world famous. They were Sergeant and Ravignac.

Little by little the crowd went up the spiral staircase.

"One must drink anyhow," they said. Great was their wrath when it was found that the gentry of the ball had ransacked the buffet. Not a cake, not a drop of champagne, not one soft drink, no beer, not a chocolate, not a sweet, no fruit remained, nothing, not a single eatable or a drink. The dancers had pillaged, ravaged and wiped off everything. Details were forthcoming from the servants whose faces, preternaturally solemn, concealed their desire to laugh.

The ladies had been even more rapacious than the men and had eaten and drunk themselves ill. It was as though they were listening to the tale of the sack of a city during an invasion, narrated by the survivors. There was nothing for it but to go home. The men were lamenting the twenty francs they had contributed to the collection; and swore heartily at those up above who had not only gorged themselves but had had the privilege without paying for it. The lady patrons had collected more than three thousand francs. There remained after paying expenses, two hundred and twenty francs for the orphans of the sixth ward.

Escorting the Walter family home Georges sat facing his director's wife. Again he noticed that troubled, caressing, fleeting glance. "I really believe she's nibbling," he told himself and smiled at this second recent confirmation of his powers with women, for since the resumption of their relationship Mme de Marelle had cast off all restraint and her passion for him was frenzied.

He went home with joyous steps.

Madeleine was waiting for him in the drawing room.

"I have news for you," she said. "The Morocco business has been muddled. France can't send an expeditionary force there for months. We are going to use this to turn out the ministry, and Laroche's opportunity has come for the portfolio of Foreign Affairs."

Du Roy, to vex his wife, pretended disbelief. It would be madness to revive the Tunis bungle.

She moved impatiently. "I tell you it's true! I tell you it's true! You don't understand that with these people it's only a matter of money. Nowadays, my dear, in political matters, 'cherchez la femme' is out of date. It's 'cherchez l'affaire.' "

"Rubbish!" he said spitefully to annoy her. It did annoy her and she replied exasperatedly: "Upon my word you are as dull and stupid as Forestier was."

She wanted to hurt and awaited an angry outburst, but he merely smiled and answered: "Really! As big a fool as that cuckold Forestier?"

The word shocked her. "Oh! Georges!" she murmured.

His manner was insolent and jeering: "What's the matter? You admitted to me the other evening that you had been unfaithful to him, didn't you?" And he added: "Poor devil!" in a tone of profound pity.

Madeleine disdained any reply and turned her back on him; then after a short silence she went on: "We shall have a big crowd here on Wednesday: Mme Laroche-Mathieu will dine with us, with the Viscountess de Percemur. Will you ask Rival and Norbert de Varenne? I will see Mmes Walter and de Marelle myself. Perhaps I'll invite Mme Rissolin too."

For some time passed she had been wire-pulling, using her husband's political influence to draw to their house, more or less willingly the wives of senators and deputies who wanted backing in *la Vie Française*.

Du Roy agreed to be responsible for Rival and Norbert. He grinned happily pleased that he had found an excellent method of annoying his wife and satisfying that obscure bitterness, that gnawing confused jealousy born in him on the evening of their drive in the Bois. He never referred to Forestier now without adding the word cuckold. He felt it would end in infuriating Madeleine. And at least ten times during that evening he found opportunity, with pretended joviality, of mentioning "that cuckold of a Forestier."

He no longer hated the dead man: he was avenging him.

His wife appeared not to notice and sat opposite him, smiling, composed and indifferent.

The next day, while she was writing the invitation to Mme Walter, he volunteered to deliver it, solely to secure an interview with la Patronne alone and find out her feelings towards him.

At two o'clock he was ushered into her drawing room. Mme Walter appeared. She looked pleased as she extended her hand.

"What happy breeze sends you here?"

"No good breeze except the wish to see you. Some power has drawn me to you. I don't know why, for I've really nothing to say. I've come that's all. Forgive me for such an

early call and my blunt explanation." He spoke in gallant, semi-playful tones, with a smile on his lips but with an under-current of seriousness.

She was taken aback and, blushing a little, faltered: "But...really...I don't understand...you surprise me."

He added: "It's a declaration, made in a joking way, because I don't want to startle you."

They were sitting close to one another. She was listening with pleased interest.

"Then it's...something serious?"

"It is indeed. I've wanted to tell you for a long time, a very long time, but I haven't dared. Everyone says you are so severe, so strict..."

She had recovered her self-possession and answered.

"Why have you picked on to-day?"

"I don't know," he lowered his voice,—“perhaps because I've thought of nothing but you since yesterday."

She suddenly became pale. "Come, enough of this childishness. Let's talk about something else."

But he was now kneeling beside her and she was afraid. She tried to rise; but both his arms went round her, and kept her seated. His voice became passionate.

"Yes, it's true. I love you—have done madly for ages. Don't speak. You are sending me mad. I tell you I love you...If you only knew how much!" She, breathless and faint, tried to speak but could not articulate a word. She pushed him off with both hands, gripped his hair to ward off the approach of that mouth reaching for her own, twisted her head right and left, left and right frantically, shutting her eyes not to see him.

His hands touched her over her dress, handled her, felt her and she was swooning under the heavy brutal caress. He rose suddenly and tried to clasp her to him but, free for just one second, she escaped his grasp and fled from the room.

He judged that pursuit would make him look ridiculous, so he let himself collapse on a chair, his head in his hands, feigning convulsive sobs. Then he pretended to pull himself together, cried. "Aideu, adieu!" and left.

In the hall he composedly took up his stick, and walked calmly into the street, saying to himself: "Christ, I do believe she's caught;" then strolled into a telegraph office to send a "little blue" to Clotilde, making an appointment for the morrow.

Returning home at his usual time he asked his wife: "Is everyone turning up to your dinner party?"

"Yes, only Mme Walter is doubtful. She isn't sure. She spoke of some sort of engagement, a matter of conscience. I couldn't make her out, she seemed quite peculiar. Anyway, let's hope she'll come after all."

He shrugged his shoulders: "She'll come, right enough."

None the less, he was by no means certain, and was remarkably uneasy till the day of the dinner, when Madeleine received a short note from la Patronne: "After a lot of trouble I have managed to be free for this evening and shall be with you. My husband cannot accompany me."

Du Roy thought: "I was wise not to call again. Now she's calmed down. Let's see what happens."

But he waited her arrival with some anxiety; and when she appeared, calm, rather cold and distant, he made himself very humble, very discreet, and submissive.

Mmes Laroche-Mathieu and Rissolin were accompanied by their husbands. The Viscountess de Percemur represented high society. Mme de Marelle looked ravishing in an amazingly fantastic yellow and black creation, a Spanish costume which set off well her trim form, fine figure, rounded arms, and little birdlike head.

Du Roy had on his right Mme Walter and, during dinner, talked to her on serious subjects with marked respect. Occasionally he glanced at Clotilde. "She grows prettier and fresher every day," he thought. Then his eyes wandered towards his wife. She was looking beautiful, which renewed within him his sullen bitter resentful anger.

La Patronne wanted to leave early. "I will see you home," he said. She refused. He insisted. "Why won't you let me? You are hurting me. Don't let me feel that you have not forgiven me. See how calm I am."

"You can't leave your guests like that."

He smiled: "Of course I can. I shan't be away twenty minutes. No one will notice it even. If you refuse you will really hurt me."

"Very well, you may come."

The moment they were in the carriage he caught her hand, and kissed it passionately.

"I love you, I love you. Don't stop me saying it. I'm not going to touch you. I want only to say the words, I love you."

She reproached him: "Oh! after all you promised me! It is very wrong of you, very wicked."

He made an assumed effort and then went on in a controlled voice: "I'm myself now, you can see.... But let me just step inside your house for five minutes, only to kneel at your feet and say those three words and look into your adorable face."

She had left her hand in his, and answered in halting tones: "No! I can't. I don't want to. Think what the servants would say, and my daughters. No, no, no, it is out of the question."

"But I can't live without seeing you. Besides it need not be in your house. I must see you if it's only for one minute every day, just to touch your hand, to breathe the perfumed air around you, to gaze on the beauty of your form, and your lovely great eyes which bewitch me."

It was banal enough, this song of love. But hackneyed, commonplace, vulgar though it was she was drinking it all in like music and was actually trembling.

"No, no...it is impossible...be quiet...I mustn't listen."

He lowered his voice, whispering into her ear, realizing that this simple soul must be captured by slow stages, that he would have to persuade her to grant him a meeting somewhere, at a place of her choice at first, and afterwards his.

"Listen...I must...I will see you...I will wait before your door...like a beggar...if you don't come down, I will come up...but see you I will...I will...to-morrow."

"No, no! You are not to come. I will not receive you. Think of my daughters."

"Then tell me where I can meet you...in the street...any-

where...any time...if I can only see you...I shall greet you...just say 'I love you' and I shall be gone."

She hesitated and was lost. As the carriage drew up at her door, she whispered hurriedly: "I will be in the Church of the Trinity at half past three to-morrow afternoon."

When he got back his wife asked him: "Where have you been all this time?" And he answered in a low voice: "I had to go to the Post office to wire off something urgent."

Mme de Marelle came across to them. "You can take me home, Bel-Ami. That was the condition I made when I came;" and turning to Madeleine: "You're sure you're not jealous."

Mme du Roy answered slowly: "No, not excessively."

The guests left. Mme Laroche-Mathieu looked like a little provincial nursery maid. She was a notary's daughter and Laroche had married her when he was a struggling solicitor. Mme Rissolin, old and overdressed, was like a retired midwife. The Viscountess de Percemur looked down on all of them. Her flabby white paw touched their plebeian hands with repugnance. Clotilde, a filmy cloud of lace, remarked to Madeleine at the door: "Your dinner party was perfect. You will soon be keeping the first political salon in Paris."

Alone with Georges she drew him to her arms: "Oh! my darling Bel-Ami, I love you more every day."

The cab rumbled them off, rolling like a ship at sea.

"It's not so nice in here as in our room," she said.

"No" he answered...but his thoughts were with Mme Walter.

CHAPTER IV

TRINITY Square was almost deserted under the blazing July sun. Paris was overwhelmed by the sluggish heat, as if the dull heavy scorching air from above had collapsed on to the city below in an unnerving enervating mass.

The water from the fountains in front of the Church trickled feebly; it seemed too weary to flow and that in the pond, with its floating leaves and fragments of paper, was a stagnant muddy green.

On the stone fountain edge was a solitary dog, stretched out in a vain attempt to cool himself by the water. A few people sprawled on the seats, in the little garden facing the Church entrance, looked at the animal enviously.

Du Roy took out his watch. It was only three o'clock. He was half an hour early.

The thought of the rendezvous amused him and he chuckled. Churches have various uses, he reflected. They can console one for having married a Jew, confer an attitude of aloofness in the world of politics, an odour of sanctity in society and afford cover for clandestine meetings. One can use religion to one's own advantage, as one can everything else. If things are set fair it is a walking stick, if too hot a sunshade, in stormy weather an umbrella, and when not wanted, can always be left behind. That was what religion meant to her; and there were hundreds like her, who make a smug mockery of Almighty God, even use Him as a go-between, and would bitterly resent any criticism of their blasphemy. The sort of women who would be shocked at the idea of being taken to a hotel, but who find it quite natural to conduct a love affair at the foot of the altar.

He walked slowly round the pond, then looked at the Church clock. Only five minutes had passed. He decided it would be more pleasant inside, and entered the Church.

It was refreshingly cool within, and, to make himself familiar with the rendezvous, he strolled about the nave.

Another man was patrolling the great building and his regular steps, stopping now and again echoed du Roy's, a fat bald fellow, marching about with his nose in the air, and his hat held behind his back.

Here and there an aged woman knelt, face in hands.

A feeling of solitude, remoteness, rest, calmed the mind; the dim light through the stained glass windows soothed the eyes.

Du Roy returned to the west door and consulted his watch again. It was only fifteen minutes past three. He sat down in the main aisle, regretting that he could not light a cigarette; all the time he heard the ceaseless promenade of the fat gentleman.

Some one entered. Georges turned round sharply. It was a poor woman meanly clad. Near the first chair she fell on her knees and remained motionless, fingers locked, gazing upwards, her spirit rapt in prayer.

Du Roy looked at her with interest wondering what sorrow, what grief, what despair had brought low that humble soul. Her misery had broken her heart, that was obvious. Perhaps she had a brutal husband, a dying child it might be.

Mentally he murmured: "Poor wretches. Why must such suffering be?"

Anger mounted within him at nature's pitiless savagery. Then he reflected that these poor destitutes, at least, had the comfort of believing that Someone pitied them from on high and that their human lot was being inscribed in the registers of Heaven with all the balance in their favour in the debit and credit account. On high—where else, if not there?

And du Roy pondering great thoughts in the silence of the Church passed his judgment on creation: "What a complete muddle it all is!"

The rustle of a dress roused him. He rose quickly and went towards her. She did not offer her hand and murmured in a low voice: "I've only a few minutes. I must go back. Kneel down close to me, so as not to draw anyone's attention to us."

She led the way down the great nave looking for a suitably secluded place, clearly very familiar with the building. Her

face was concealed behind a thick veil, and she walked so softly that she could hardly be heard.

Near the choir, she turned round, and said in that mysterious undertone that we reserve for churches: "The transepts will be better. We are too exposed here." She bowed to the High Altar deeply and genuflected, turned to the right, came back a little towards the entrance and, finally making up her mind, knelt down at a prie-Dieu.

Georges took possession of the neighbouring prie-Dieu and there they were in the attitude of prayer.

"Thanks. Thanks," he said: "I adore you. I want to say it over and over again, to tell you how I first began to love you, how I was conquered the very first time I saw you... One day you must let me open my heart and tell you it all."

She was listening to him in an attitude of prayerful meditation as if she heard nothing. She answered through her fingers: "I am mad to allow you to speak to me like this, mad to have come here at all, mad to do what I am doing, mad to lead you to believe that this...this...this adventure can come to anything. Forget it all. You must. And never speak to me of it again."

She waited. He sought for a reply, decisive, passionate phrases, but could not suit the appropriate gestures to the words, in his awkward position. He said: "I expect nothing. I hope for nothing. I love you. Whatever you do I shall repeat that to you, so often and with such strength and passion that in the end you will believe me. My love shall enter your heart and mind, word by word, hour by hour, day by day, till at last it will fill you like nectar, drop by drop, sweetening you, softening you, and, much later, forcing you at last to say: 'I love you too'."

He felt her breast heaving, her breath trembling by his side; suddenly she faltered: "I love you too."

He started as if one some one had struck him and gasped. "Oh! my God!"

She went on in stumbling accents: "Ought I to say such a thing to you? I feel myself guilty, shameless...I...who have two young daughters...but I can't help myself...I can't help

myself...I can't help it...I would never have believed it... never dreamed it possible...it is too much...too much for me. Listen...listen...I have never loved before...only you... I swear it.... And you, I have loved for a year...in secret ...in my heart! Oh! How I have suffered and struggled against it...I can't any more. I love you..."

Tears were falling through her fingers, pressed to her face, and her whole body trembled, shaken by the violence of her emotion.

Georges whispered: "Give me your hand, that I may touch it, press it."

She drew her hand slowly from her face. He saw her wet cheeks and tears gathering in her eyes, ready to fall.

He had taken her hand and was fondling it: "Oh! that I might drink your tears."

Her low crushed voice was a moan.

"Don't take advantage of me...I am lost."

He stifled a smile. How could he take advantage of her in that place? He pressed the hand he was clasping against his heart and asked: "Can you feel it beating?"—For he had about exhausted his stock of passionate phrases.

For some little time the regular footsteps of the solitary patroller had been drawing nearer them. He had finished his tour of the altars and now, for the second time at least, was approaching from the small transept on the right. When Mme Walter heard him, near their sheltering pillar, she snatched her hand from Georges' clasp and covered her face again. There they were two motionless figures, devoutly kneeling, as if addressing heartfelt supplications to high heaven. The fat gentleman passed close, cast an indifferent glance at them and made for the west end of the Church, his hat still firmly planted behind his back.

Du Roy who wanted a rendezvous somewhere other than Trinity Church whispered: "Where shall I see you to-morrow?"

She gave no reply; she seemed inanimate, changed into a statue of Prayer. "To-morrow would you like to meet in Monceau Park?"

She turned to him, her face uncovered. It was drawn with suffering, anguished. Her voice was tremulous: "Leave me ...leave me now...go away...go away...just for five minutes ...I suffer too much near you...I beg you...I can't...let me ask God to forgive me...to save me...leave me...five minutes...."

Her face was so ravaged, so woebegone that he rose without a word, hesitated, then asked: "May I return presently?"

A movement of her head gave assent, and he moved away towards the choir. Then she tried to pray. She made a superhuman effort to call upon God, her whole body vibrating and the lost soul within it. "Mercy!" she cried to heaven. She shut her eyes with frenzy at not seeing the expected visitant coming to her aid. She drove the thought of him from her, battled within herself against him, but, in place of the celestial apparition her sorrowful heart awaited, she saw only the florid face of a young man.

For a whole year, every day and every night, she had struggled thus against this overpowering obsession, this image which haunted her dreams, which shrivelled her flesh and made her nights unbearable. She felt like a trapped animal, ensnared, bound, thrown into the arms of the victorious male who had vanquished and overcome her and had done it with nothing but a handsome face and the colour of his eyes.

And now in this church, in God's near presence, she felt more feeble, more forsaken, more lost even than in her own home. Already she was suffering by his absence. Yet she fought on even in her despair. She fought herself, appealed for help with all the strength of her soul. She would rather have died than succumb in this way, she who had never fallen. She murmured desperate words of supplication; but heard only Georges' footfalls dwindling away into silence in the distance.

She realized that it was the end, that her struggle availed her nothing. But she would not surrender. She became possessed by one of those mental storms which make women cast themselves shaking, screaming, contorted to the ground. She was shivering violently in every limb, she knew she was

going to fall, tumbling in screeching convulsions amongst the chairs. A quick step drew near. She turned her head. It was a priest. She staggered up and ran to him holding out her clasped hands and entreated him: "Oh! Save me! Save me!" He pulled up surprised: "What is it you want, Madame?"

"I want you to save me. Have pity on me. If you don't help me I am lost."

He was a young man, tall with full, close shaved, dark cheeks, a fashionable city vicar of an opulent parish, well accustomed to rich penitents.

He looked at her wondering if she was mad; and answered: "What can I do for you?"

"Receive my confession," she said, "and advise me, support me, tell me what I must do."

"I hear confessions on Saturdays at three o'clock and six."

She grasped his arms and held them: "No! No! No! At once! At once! You must. He is here now! In this church! He is waiting for me!"

The priest demanded: "Who is waiting for you?"

"A man...who is going to ruin me, if you don't save me... I cannot flee from him...I am too weak...so weak...so weak!"

She sank to her knees moaning: "Oh! Have pity on me, my father! Save me, in God's name, save me!"

She caught hold of his black cassock so that he could not free himself; he glanced uneasily round, wondering whether any malicious or devout eye was watching this woman kneeling at his feet. He saw that escape was impossible. "Get up," he said, "I happen to have the key of the confessional with me;" and feeling in his pocket, he drew out a bunch of keys, chose one and rapidly led her to one of the little boxes, those closets for the ordure of the soul in which the faithful empty their sins.

He entered the middle one and shut it after him and Mme Walter, literally threw herself at the penitents' partition in a passion of frantic hope.

"Bless me, my father, for I have sinned."

Du Roy, after strolling round the choir made for the aisle

on the left. In the middle he came upon the stout bald gentleman still methodically patrolling with stolid measured tread, and he asked what this oddity was doing there. The patroller had come to a halt, looking at Georges, obviously wanting to speak to him. When they were quite near one another he said with great politeness: "Pardon, Monsieur, what period was this church built in?"

Du Roy replied: "Ma foi, I'm no authority; I should think it's about twenty years old or twenty-five perhaps. It's the first time I've been in the place."

"I, too. I've never seen it before to-day."

The journalist's interest was roused.

"You seem to be examining it very thoroughly, you must have inspected every single detail."

The other replied resignedly: "I'm not viewing it at all, Monsieur. I'm simply waiting for my wife. She made an appointment to meet me here and is very late."

He added after a second or two: "It's very hot, outside."

Du Roy looked him up and down, sized him up as a good-natured simpleton, and suddenly fancied he resembled Forestier.

"You are from the country?" he asked.

"Yes. From Rennes. And you, Monsieur, are you in the church through curiosity?"

"No. I'm waiting for a lady too." And with a wave of the hand the journalist strolled on, a smile on his lips. By the great west door he saw the poor woman again, still on her knees praying fervently. "Christ," he muttered. "She'll be all day at it." He no longer pitied her or felt the least moved. He passed by her and quietly entered the right aisle again to find Mme Walter. From a little way off he glanced at the place where he had left her and was astonished not to see her. At first he thought he had mistaken their sheltering pillar and looked carefully round again. She had disappeared. He was amazed and furiously angry. Then it occurred to him that she was looking for him and he went all over the church. She was not to be found, and he returned and sat down on the chair she had occupied, hoping she would join him. And

there he waited. Presently he noticed the low murmur of voices. He had not seen a soul in that corner of the building. From where did this mumbling come then? He rose to find out and perceived in the lady chapel the doors of the confessional. The end of a dress protruded from one of them and was stretched along the floor. He went up and looked at it. He recognized it. She was confessing!...

He felt a violent desire to take her by the shoulders and drag her out of the confessional. Then he thought: "Bah! It's the cure's turn to-day; it will be mine to-morrow;" and sat composedly down facing the little apertures, waiting his time and chuckling at the new development of the affair.

He had to wait long. At last Mme Walter rose from her knees, turned round, saw him and came over. Her face was stern and cold.

"Monsieur," she said, "I must ask you not to accompany me, not to follow me and not to come to my house alone. If you do, you will not be received. Adieu!" And she left him with frigid dignity.

He let her go, for his technique was never to force events. Then, as the priest emerged from his retreat he walked up to him and looking him straight in the eyes snarled: "If you were not wearing petticoats I would plant two punches on your ugly snout." He turned on his heel and walked out of the church whistling.

Outside the main door the fat gentleman, hat on head and hands clasped behind him, was still wearily waiting, peering across the great square at all the streets running into it.

Du Roy made for *la Vie Française*. Inside he saw at once from the bustling strenuous manner of the staff that something out of the way had happened; and hurriedly entered the director's room.

Daddy Walter was standing, flustered and nervous, dictating an article in spasmodic phrases, giving assignments, between paragraphs to a crowd of reporters round him, issuing instructions to Boisrenard and opening the mail.

He was delighted to see du Roy.

"Ah! What luck! Here's Bel-Ami!"

He broke off, a little embarrassed and apologized: "I'm sorry I called you that but I'm half off my head. Hearing my wife and daughters talk of you as 'Bel-Ami' day in and day out, I've got into the habit myself. I hope you don't mind."

Georges laughed. "Not in the least. I like it."

Daddy Walter went on: "All right then, I baptize you Bel-Ami, like every one else. Now listen. There have been great goings on. The ministry has fallen by three hundred and ten votes to two hundred. All our vacations are cancelled, put off to the Greek Kalends and here we stick till the twenty-eighth of July at least. Spain is working up trouble over Morocco and that's what's thrown out Durand de l'Aine and his gang. We are in it ourselves, up to the neck. Marrot is entrusted with the job of forming the new Cabinet. He is taking General Boutin d'Acre for War and our man Laroche-Mathieu gets Foreign Affairs. He is taking the Interior portfolio himself and the Presidency of the Council with it. We are going to be the official Government organ. I'm doing the leading article now, a simple declaration of principles, mapping out their policy for the ministers."

The old fellow smiled and added: "And they'll have to toe the line, that's understood. But I want something interesting on the Morocco question, something realistic, sensational, right up to date? Can you manage it for me?"

Du Roy reflected a moment: "I'll give you the very thing. An article on the political situation in the whole of our African colony with Tunis on the left, Algeria in the middle and Morocco on the right, an account of the races populating the whole territory and a plan for an expedition on the Moroccan frontier up to the great Oasis of Figuig where no European has yet penetrated and which is the cause of the actual dispute. How will that do?"

Daddy Walter exclaimed: "First rate! What title?"

"From Tunis to Tangier!"

"Excellent!"

Du Roy, left to go through the files of *la Vie Française*, to retrieve his very first article "Reminiscences of a Chasseur d'Afrique" which debaptized, furbished up and modified

would completely meet the case from beginning to end since its *motif* was colonial policy, the Algerian population and an incursion into the province of Oran.

In three quarters of an hour the whole thing was remade, patched up and brought up to date by some topical words of flattery and commendation of the new Cabinet.

The director read it though enthusiastically: "It's perfect," he said... "perfect...perfect. You are a most valuable man. Congratulations." Du Roy went home to dinner satisfied with his day, in spite of the check at Trinity.

His wife was waiting for him impatiently. The moment she saw him she cried: "Have you heard? Laroche is minister for Foreign Affairs!"

"Yes, I've just done an article on Algeria for the occasion."

"What article?"

"You know it; the first one, the one we wrote together, 'Reminiscences of a Chasseur d'Afrique,' revised and corrected to meet the case."

She smiled: "Ah! yes, that was smart of you." She thought it over for a little while. "I have an idea: that series you were going to follow that one up with...and...abandoned. We would begin it straight away. It would be a very effective series, just the thing in the present state of affairs."

Sitting down to his soup, he answered: "You're right; and there's no one to stop it now that cuckold of a Forestier is dead."

This time she took him up. Her tone was sharp and offended.

"This form of humour is in bad taste and I must ask you to put an end to it. It has gone on long enough."

He might have given some sarcastic reply; but a telegram was brought to him containing one solitary sentence without any signature: "I had lost my head. Forgive me and come to-morrow, four o'clock. Monceau Park."

He understood and his heart jumped with joy; slipping the blue form into his pocket, he said to his wife.

"I won't do it any more, darling. I own I was in the wrong."

He began his dinner; all through it the words ran through

his thoughts: "I had lost my head. Forgive me and come tomorrow, four o'clock, Monceau Park." So she had given in. What she meant was: "I surrender myself to you, I am yours when you will, where you will."

He started laughing. Madeleine asked: "What's the matter?"

"Nothing much. I was thinking of a curé I met just now, with a comical face."

Du Roy arrived at the rendezvous the next afternoon exactly on time. All the park seats were filled by bourgeois, sweltering in the heat and listless nurses heedlessly dreaming their time away while their little charges rolled about on the gravel walk.

He discovered Mme Walter in the little ancient ruined building where the spring has its source. She looked ill at ease and unhappy, walking to and fro between the pillars.

As he greeted her she commented nervously on the crowd: "The whole world seems congregated in this garden."

He seized the opportunity.

"Yes. You're right. Would you care to go somewhere else?"

"But where?"

"Anywhere. In a cab, if you like. You can pull down the blind on your side and you will be quite unobserved."

"Yes, I would prefer that. Here I'm frightened to death."

"All right. Give me five minutes to get to the exit leading to the lower boulevard and I'll bring back a cab."

He went off, running. As soon as he rejoined her and she had obscured the window on her side she asked: "Where have you told the coachman to drive us?"

Georges answered: "Don't bother about that. He knows his way."

He had given the driver the address of his flat in the rue de Constantinople.

She went on: "You can't think how much I have suffered on your account, how I've been tormented and tortured. Yesterday I was cruel in the church but I wanted to escape at all costs. I feel so terrified when I'm alone with you."

Have you forgiven me?"

He took her hands: "Of course I have. How can I help forgiving you, loving you as I do?"

She looked at him in supplication. "Listen, you must promise to treat me with respect...not to...not to...otherwise I must not see you any more."

At first he didn't answer her. Under his moustache he was smiling, that elusive cryptic smile which troubled women. Then he murmured: "I am your slave."

Then she began telling him how she first realized she loved him. It was when she learned that he was going to marry Madeleine Forestier. She gave him details, circumstantial little incidents of dates and intimate things.

Suddenly, she was silent. The carriage had stopped. Du Roy opened the door.

"Where are we?" she asked.

He answered: "Please alight and come into the house. We shall be quiet there."

"But where are we?"

"At my flat, the flat of my bachelor days. I took it over again...a few days ago...so that we can have a little corner where we can see one another."

She was clinging to the shelter of the cab, frightened at the idea of this tête-à-tête, and faltered.

"No, no, I don't want to! I don't want to!"

He answered vigorously: "I swear to respect you. Come. You can see everyone is looking at us, there'll be quite a crowd collecting presently. "Hurry...Hurry...get down."

And he repeated: "I take my oath to respect you."

A wine merchant by the door was eyeing them curiously. She became panic-stricken and vanished into the house.

She made for the staircase. His arm restrained her: "In here, the ground floor flat." And he impelled her inside.

He had no sooner shut the door than he leaped at her like an animal at its prey. She resisted frantically, struggling, entreating: "Oh! my God...Oh! my God!"

He was kissing her neck, her eyes, her lips, savagely. She could not escape his passionate caresses; and even while she

repulsed him, recoiled from his mouth, in spite of herself she was returning his kisses. Quite suddenly her struggles ceased, and conquered, submissive, she let him undress her. One by one, skilfully and quickly with fingers as light as those of a lady's maid, he removed every single part of her attire.

With her hands she had drawn a petticoat to her, to try to conceal the lower part of her body, and stood, all white, amid her clothing, strewn about her feet.

She let him remove her shoes and carry her in his arms towards the bed. Then she murmured in broken tones: "I swear to you...I have never had a lover." Just as a young girl would have said: "I swear to you that I am a virgin."

And he thought. "Well! well! Here is someone like myself!"

CHAPTER V

It was autumn. The du Roys had stayed in Paris the whole summer and during the short parliamentary recess had conducted energetic campaign in favour of the ministry.

In Morocco the situation was threatening and, although it was still only early October, both Chambers were resuming session.

No one seriously believed there would be any Tangier expedition in spite of an eloquent speech, on Parliament being prorogued, from a Conservative deputy, the Count de Lambert Sarrazin, who like the celebrated Viceroy of India of old time volunteered to wager his moustache that there would be one. He had added: "The African Protectorate, gentlemen, is to France a gigantic fire-place in which we are burning our best wood, a fire-place with such an enormous draught that it is drawing into it all the paper in the Bank."

The speech became famous and was the basis of a series of ten articles by du Roy on the Algerian colony, the projected and abandoned series of his early days with the paper. In it he vigorously supported the proposed military expedition though fully convinced that there would never be one. He banged the patriotic drum and bombarded Spain with a whole arsenal of those specious arguments with which we assail people who presume to have interests at variance with our own.

The importance of *la Vie Française* had increased enormously now that it was the mouthpiece of Authority. From its friends in the ministry it received first hand information of coming political events; and every journal in Paris and the provinces came to it for news. It was quoted, feared and, to a certain extent, respected. It was no longer the shady agent of a gang, of political wire-pullers but the avowed cabinet organ. Laroche-Mathieu was the paper's mind and du Roy its voice. Daddy Walter, dumb deputy and crafty director, hovered in the shadows, busy, rumour said, with a big and

dubious deal in Morocco copper mines.

Madeleine's salon had become a centre of influence, the meeting place every week of various cabinet ministers. Even the President of the Council had twice dined at her house; and statesmen's wives who, a little before would have hesitated to cross her threshold now competed for a nod from her, paying calls which she seldom returned.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs reigned almost like a master in the house. He came at all times with despatches, plans, news which he would dictate sometimes to the husband, sometimes to the wife as if they were his secretaries.

Du Roy disliked this jumped-up mediocrity, and alone with Madeleine after the minister's departure, his tone was contemptuous and inclined to be threatening.

Madeleine was not impressed and would shrug her shoulders contemptuously: "Do as well as he has done. Become a minister yourself. Then you can afford to talk. Till then, keep quiet."

On one of these occasions, tugging his moustache he said: "You don't know what I'm capable of. One of these days, perhaps, you will find out."

She answered composedly: "We live and learn."

On the morning of the re-opening of Parliament the young wife, still in bed, was driving home innumerable admonitions to him. He was dressing and was due to lunch at M Laroche-Mathieu's and receive instructions before the sitting, for the next day's political leader in *la Vie Française*. The article was to be the official announcement of the cabinet's programme for the session. "And mind, above all, don't forget to ask him if General Belloncle is to be ambassador at Oran, as is rumoured. If he is, it is very significant and means a lot."

Georges replied testily: "I know what to do as well as you do. Give me a rest from your endless repetitions."

She went on calmly: "My dear, you forget half the commissions I give you for the Minister."

"Blast your minister," he growled. "I'm sick of him. He's a fool."

She was unperturbed: "He is no more my minister than

yours. He is more useful to you than to me."

He turned to her with a laugh: "Anyway he doesn't make love to me."

She answered slowly: "Nor to me either. But he's making our fortune."

This silenced him momentarily, then he went on: "If I had to choose from amongst your admirers, I think I should prefer that old blockhead de Vaudrec. What's become of him by the way? It's more than a week since I've seen him."

"He is ill," she said, without emotion. "He wrote me that he's in bed with gout. You ought to look him up, with the news. You know he likes you, and it would please him."

"Yes; of course, I'll look him up."

He had finished dressing and after a final glance round to see if he had forgotten anything, went to the bed and kissed his wife on the forehead. "Au revoir, darling, I shan't be back till seven at the earliest."

M Laroche-Mathieu was expecting him. He was lunching at ten o'clock that morning, the cabinet sitting at midday before the reopening of Parliament.

Except for the presence of the minister's parliamentary secretary they lunched alone, Mme Laroche-Mathieu not being willing to change the hour of her own meal. Du Roy ran over his article outlining its scheme from rough notes scribbled on visiting cards.

"Is there anything you would like to modify, my dear minister?"

"Very little, my dear fellow. Perhaps you are a little bit too definite about the Morocco business. Speak of the expedition as if it ought to take place, but hint that it will not, and that you, personally, don't expect it. Let the public read between the lines that we're not going to burn our fingers in the adventure."

"Exactly. I understand. Rely on me. My wife wants me to ask you if General Belloncle is to be ambassador to Oran. In view of what you've told me I presume he is not."

"He is not."

Their conversation turned to the opening session. Laroche-

Mathieu began to orate, rehearsing the sentences he was going to inflict on his colleagues a few hours later on. He brandished his right hand, cleaving the air with a fork, knife or piece of bread, looking at no one, addressing the invisible assembly, literally expectorating liquid eloquence of the intellectual level of a fifth form schoolboy.

A tiny waxed moustache adorned his upper lip with two twin points like scorpions' tails and his hair, greasy with brilliantine and parted in the middle, was plastered down over his temples in the fashion of the typical small town dandy. Though a young man, he was a little too fat, a little too puffy and a little too smug. His secretary, doubtless quite used to these oratorical shower baths, calmly went on eating and drinking; but du Roy, intensely jealous of his success muttered to himself: "What a lout! What numbskulls these politicians are!"

Comparing himself, at his own valuation, with this gabbling mediocrity of a minister he thought: "Christ, if only I had a hundred thousand francs to appear with before my own Rouen election committee what a statesman I would make by the side of these witless blackguards."

M Laroche-Mathieu continued his harangue from soup to coffee and then, realizing he was late called for his carriage. He shook hands with the journalist.

"Is everything clear old fellow?"

"Perfectly, my dear minister, rely on me."

Being disengaged till four o'clock du Roy went to the office to begin his article. At four he was due at the rue de Constantinople to meet Mme de Marelle who came there regularly twice a week on Mondays and Fridays. But as he entered the reporter's room a sealed note was handed him; it was from Mme Walter and read:

"It is absolutely necessary that I speak to you to-day. It is very serious, most serious. Meet me at two o'clock rue de Constantinople. I can do you a great service.

"Your love until death.

Virginie."

He swore. "*Nom de Dieu!* What a woman!" And,

thoroughly disgruntled, he flung out of the office, too exasperated to work.

For six weeks he had been trying to break with her, without the least slackening in her mad infatuation.

After her surrender she had undergone agonies of remorse and at three successive rendezvous had overwhelmed her lover with reproaches and maledictions. Bored by these scenes and already satiated with the middle-aged melodramatic woman he had simply kept away from her, hoping that by this means, the affair would die a natural death. It was useless. She had clung to him desperately, casting herself, so to say, into love as if she was jumping into a river with a stone tied to her neck. He had allowed himself to be recaptured, partly through weakness, partly good nature, and partly through a certain amount of liking for her; and now she had him imprisoned in her unrestrained cloying passion, and was simply persecuting him with love.

Every single day she wanted to see him and, at any moment, he was liable to be summoned by telegrams to meetings at street corners, in shops and in public parks.

At these appointments she would burble with monotonous iteration and in identical words again and again that she adored him and worshipped him. Then she would be off, swearing to him that just the sight of him had made her happy.

She showed herself quite different from what he had anticipated, trying to cajole him with school girl graces and baby talk, ridiculous in a woman of her age. Hitherto, strictly conventional, placidly respectable, virginal at heart, immune from passion, ignorant of all sensuality, to this matter-of-fact sensible woman whose middle age had seemed a pale autumn after a cold summer, had suddenly come a kind of faded spring full of badly grown, stunted flowers and withered buds, a strange retarded growth of the love of a young girl, clumsily ardent, with all the spontaneous high spirits and little gurgling cries of sixteen, awkward veteran antics of one who had never been really young. She wrote him a dozen letters a day, silly

girlish effusions, comically poetic, full of allusions to flowers and birds.

Alone with him, she would embrace him with ponderous artlessness like a fat elderly tomboy, grotesque grimaces, and little skipping jumps which visibly shook the too heavy breasts under her dress. He was continually sickened by hearing himself called "my pippin," "my duck," "my jewel," "my treasure," "my blue bird," and by seeing her offer herself with a farcical comedy of girlish prudery, puerile little affectations of fear like a boarding school miss run to seed which she considered bewitching and beguiling.

She would demand: "Whose lips are these?" and when he did not instantly answer: "Mine," would insist on it till he nearly collapsed with boredom.

He had expected her to show in love, tact, dignity, propriety, a certain amount of preliminary restraint suitable to a matron in her forties, the mother of a family, an experienced woman of the world; that her surrender would be serious, made with controlled mature passion not without tears, perhaps, but the tears of Didon, not those of Juliet.

She would burble to him unceasingly: "How I love you my little one! How dear you are to me, my baby!" He never heard her say the words "my little one," and "my baby" without wanting to retaliate by calling her "my old woman."

Endlessly she would repeat: "How mad I was to yield myself to you! But I don't regret it. It is good to be in love."

It all irritated Georges beyond endurance. She declaimed the words, "It is good to be in love," like the juvenile lead in a theatre.

Then she exasperated him by her clumsy earnestness.

Suddenly become sensual, her blood enflamed by the possession of a young man, she applied herself to the practical technique of love with an indomitable, painstaking perseverance and uncouth, methodical assiduity which made du Roy laugh and which reminded him of old men just learning to read.

And at the moment when she should have lain in his embrace, fainting yet piercing him with burning terrible gaze as some women no longer young, do, superb in their last love,

when, silent and trembling, her lips should have clung to his, she tired but insatiable would frisk and gambol like an elderly hobbledehoy lisping: "I love you so much my little boy. I love you so much. Love your little girl a little more."

At that stage he had to stifle the desire to swear, grab his hat and clear out, banging the door after him.

At first they were often seen together in the rue de Constantinople but, latterly, du Roy, dreading that they might run into Mme de Marelle, invented innumerable excuses to keep her away from there.

This meant that he had constantly to be at her own house, sometimes to lunch, sometimes dinner. There she would squeeze his hand under the table, and kiss him behind doorways. Suzanne provided relief, cheering him up with her lively pranks. In that doll-like little body dwelt a quick mischievous wit, ingenuous and incalculable, a light dancing merriment always on show like a marionette at a fair. Her mocking biting little witticisms spared no one and Georges stimulated and provoked her. It was always: "Listen Bel-Ami. Come here Bel-Ami," and on these occasions he would promptly desert the mother for her young daughter, who would murmur some malicious naughtiness in his ear, and they would both laugh unrestrainedly.

But in spite of this palliative, nauseated by the mother's infatuation he now felt overwhelming repugnance to her: he could no longer see her, hear her, nor think of her without disgust. He stopped going to her house, answering her letters and yielding to her appeals. She realized, at last, that he no longer cared for her and suffered terribly. But she still fastened herself on him, spied on him, followed him, waylaid him in cabs with drawn blinds, outside his office, in doorways, in the streets, wherever she thought he might be. He felt like ill-treating her, hurting her, beating her or saying to her brutally: "Damn you, I've had enough of you. You bore me to death." But he put a brake on himself on account of *la Vie Française*, trying by cold reserve, sullen looks and even occasional insolence to make her understand that he wanted to end the affair.

She resorted to all kinds of tricks to gain admission to the flat in the rue de Constantinople and he trembled with anxiety lest the two women should meet face to face there.

His affection for Mme de Marelle on the other hand increased all the summer. He called her his "little street Arab" and genuinely liked her. Their two dispositions were identical, they were, both of them of the adventurous race of the vagabonds of life, a couple of the world's nomads, gipsies on the broad highway.

They had had a delightful summer of love, a summer of students' outings and picnics, escaping to lunch or dine together at Argenteuil, Bougival, Maisons, Poissy, passing hours on the river gathering flowers from its banks. She loved nothing better than to set out with him on a clear day on the top of a suburban omnibus and, brightly chattering, while away the time passing through the ugly outskirts of Paris and the hideous middle class bungalows springing up there.

But afterwards when he had to return to dine at Mme Walter's, he detested his elderly implacable mistress, remembering the younger one he had just left who had slaked his desire and soothed his passion in riverside meadows.

He was actually congratulating himself on having freed himself from la Patronne to whom he had conveyed in clear almost brutal fashion his decision to break with her when he received at the office her telegram summoning him at two o'clock to the rue de Constantinople.

He read it again, on his way: "It is absolutely necessary that I speak to you to-day. It is very serious, most serious. Meet me at two o'clock rue de Constantinople. I can do you a great service. Your love until death. Virginie."

He thought "What does the old sausage want now? I'll wager that she has nothing whatever to tell me. All she'll do is to tell me again that she adores me. Still I must see her. She writes about something very serious and doing me a great service and there may be something in it. And Clotilde is coming at four o'clock. I shall have to get rid of her by three. Sacristi! Let's hope they don't meet. What bitches

women are!"

The thought struck him that his wife was the only one who never made a nuisance of herself. She went her own way, seemed to be fond of him during the times she allocated to love, but never allowed it to interfere with her methodical, scheduled business routine.

He walked slowly towards the flat, working himself up against la Patronne all the day.

"I'll give her a piece of my mind if she's got nothing to tell me. The language of the slums will be academic compared with mine. The first thing I'll make clear to her is that I'll never set foot in her house again."

In this frame of mind he reached the flat and awaited Mme Walter there; she arrived almost at once in great excitement: "Ah! You got my telegram! How lucky!" His reply was surly, "Parbleu, I found it at the office, just as I was off to the Chamber. What is it you want now?"

She had raised her veil to kiss him and came to him with the timid, submissive air of an oft-beaten dog.

"How cruel you are to me.... Why do you speak so unkindly? You never think how I suffer on your account."

He groaned: "Don't start that all over again."

She came closer waiting only a smile, an inviting gesture to throw herself into his arms: "You should never have taken me, if you were going to treat me like this; you should have left me, contented and happy as I used to be. Remember all you promised me in the church and how you made me come into this flat by force. And now you can speak to me like that! This is your welcome to me! How can you be so unfeeling!"

He answered her savagely: "Zut! Enough of that! I can't see you for a single moment without hearing the same everlasting refrain. Any one would think that I had seduced you at twelve years of age and that you were as ignorant as an angel. No, my dear, stick to the facts, this was no rape of a minor girl. You gave yourself to me at a ripe sensible age. I thank you for that, I am extremely grateful for it but I'm certainly not going to be tied to your apron-strings till death,

You have a husband and I have a wife. We are neither of us free. We gratified our fancies, nobody saw it, nobody knows of it and now it's over."

"Oh! How brutal you are, how shameless and common! No! I was not a young girl, but I had never loved, never fallen."

He interrupted her: "I know that. You have told me so twenty times. But you had had two children.... It was not your first experience."

She drew back shocked: "Oh! George, that's a vile thing to say."

She pressed her hands to her breast and began to sob, which increased his exasperation. He took up his hat: "Tears again! So you've come here to put over this act once more. Well, good evening." She stepped forward and barred his way out; and violently snatching her handkerchief from her pocket dried her eyes. With great difficulty she managed to control her voice.

"No," she said sorrowfully.... "I did not come for that... I came to... to give you information... political news... to put you in the way of earning fifty thousand francs... even more, if you want to."

Instantly he changed his tone, became ingratiating: "What's that? What do you mean?"

"Last evening I happened to overhear a conversation between my husband and Laroche. They never mind speaking before me, they think I don't bother to listen. But Walter advised the minister not to let you in on the secret for fear you might give it away."

Du Roy put down his hat; he waited suddenly attentive. "What is it?"

"They are going to seize Morocco!"

"Nonsense. I have just lunched with Laroche, he told me what the Cabinet's plans are."

"No, dear, they're only fooling you because they don't want you to have any inkling of their real design."

"Sit down," said Georges; and did so himself on a couch. She drew a footstool to her and sat between the young man's knees, continuing in obsequious tones.

"I think so entirely of you, that now I listen to every single rumour they talk about."

She began, quietly to explain how, for some time past, she had guessed that they were planning something unknown to him and using him as a catspaw. "You know," she boasted, "when one is in love, one becomes clever."

It was an unsavoury business, a very unsavoury business indeed, well prepared behind the scenes; and this middle-aged simpleton had managed to take it all in. She was all smiles now, elated at her own astuteness; she began to put on airs, those of a financier's wife, well-versed in stock exchange rackets, wire-pulling, manipulation of prices, speculations bringing ruin in a couple of hours on thousands of little people, small fry who made their investments trusting implicitly in honoured, respected names, in politicians, statesmen, bankers.

She repeated: "Oh! It's a very big coup they are making, enormous. Walter is the mind behind it and the other is the instrument. It is really a tremendous coup."

These preliminaries made him impatient: "Come, tell me the details."

"Well! This is it. The Tangier expedition definitely was decided on from the first day that Laroche took over the Foreign Affairs portfolio; and little by little they have bought in the whole of the Morocco loan which had fallen to sixty-four or sixty francs. They have bought very skilfully by their own secret agents without raising the least suspicion. And now they are going to launch the expedition and seize Morocco. The French State will guarantee the debt. Our two friends will make fifty or sixty millions. You see their game? And you see also how afraid they are of the slightest indiscretion, the least thing leaking out?"

She was leaning her head against his waistcoat, her arms on his knees, pressing herself to him, clinging to him, realizing that now she was really interesting him, ready to do anything, to betray anyone for one kiss, even for a smile.

"You are quite sure, of all this?"

"Absolutely positive!"

"You're right, it is indeed a tremendous business. And, as

for that swine of a Laroche this is where I put the screw on him. The blackguard! He had better be careful...he had better look to himself...his job as a minister will lie between my fingers!"

He added thoughtfully: "We ought to be able to make something out of this."

"You can still buy some of the loan," she said; "it's only at seventy-two francs."

"Yes, but I haven't any ready capital."

She looked at him, her eyes full of entreaty: "I have thought of that, my pet, and if you were nice, really nice, if you loved me a little you would let me lend it to you."

He replied sharply, almost roughly: "No! That's quite out of the question."

"Listen," she said imploringly. "There isn't a thing you can do unless you borrow the money. I want to invest ten thousand francs myself on this loan so as to provide a little nest-egg for myself. Well, I'll put up twenty thousand instead; You can take up half of it. I'm not going to borrow the money from Walter; it's my own. You won't have to pay any cash down. If it's successful you gain seventy thousand francs; if it's a total loss you owe me ten thousand which you can pay me back when you like."

He still muttered: "No, I don't approve of these partnerships."

Then she argued that as it was he who, in *la Vie Française*, had conducted the whole political campaign and thus made the scheme a practical issue it was only fair he should have a share in the profits and he would be a fool not to; and when he still hesitated she added: "Look upon it as if it is really Walter who is putting up ten thousand francs for you, for services rendered."

"All right," he said at last, "I'll come in with you for ten thousand francs. If we lose I'll pay it back to you."

She was so delighted that she got up, drew his face to her with both hands and kissed him rapturously.

He made no resistance at first, then, as she grew warmer, straining him to her and devouring him with kisses he reflected

that the other woman would be coming presently and that if he gave in, he would waste in the arms of the middle-aged woman the ardour that he wanted to keep for the young one. So he gently repelled her. "Come be sensible," he pleaded.

She looked at him with doleful eyes: "Oh! Georges, I can't even kiss you nowadays."

He excused himself: "No, not to-day. I'm a little out of sorts and that sort of thing really upsets me."

At once mollified and docile she sat down again between his knees. Then asked: "Well, you come and dine to-morrow at the house? That would be lovely."

He hesitated but was afraid to decline: "Yes, of course."
"Thanks, darling."

She was slowly rubbing her cheek against the young man's chest in a caressing regular movement and one of her long black hairs adhered to his waistcoat. She noticed it and a whimsical idea occurred to her, one of those superstitious follies so typical of women. She began softly entwining the hair round a button. Then she twisted another hair round the next button and so on until the process was complete with a hair round every one.

Kissing, he was going to detach them. She stopped him. It would bring him good luck, she said. He would be carrying about with him, without noticing it something of herself, a little lock of her hair which he had never asked for. It would be a tiny bond by which she tied him to her, a secret bond, invisible, a talisman that she left upon him. Without conscious effort it would make him think of her, dream of her and love her a little more, all the next day. Suddenly he interrupted her: "I shall have to leave you now; I have to go to the House for the end of the session. I won't fail to-morrow."

She sighed: "Already?" Then resignedly added: "Very well, darling but be sure and come to-morrow." She rose to go. Her head was aching; a sharp quick pain as if her skin had been pricked with a needle. Her heart was throbbing. But she was satisfied even at having suffered so long as it was by his side.

"Good-bye," she said.

He folded her in his arms with a pleasant smile and kissed her eyes mechanically; but she, excited even by this frigid contact murmured once more.

"Already," and her eyes entreated him.

He drew away from her and put on a hurried tone: "I must get away. I'm late even now."

He barely touched the lips she offered: "Really now, you must go. It's past three o'clock"; and she left with the final injunction: "To-morrow at seven o'clock." He turned to the left and she to the right.

Du Roy went up the hill to the outer boulevard. Then, descending he strolled slowly along the boulevard Malesherbes. Passing a confectioner's he noticed some iced chestnuts and bought a pound for Clotilde, knowing she was very fond of them. At four o'clock he was back in the flat waiting for his mistress. She came a little late, her husband having arrived for a week's stay; and her first words were: "Can you dine with us to-morrow? He will be very pleased to see you."

"Sorry I can't. I'm dining with la Patronne. We are busy on a regular conglomeration of political and financial schemes."

She had already removed her hat and was now taking off her corsets which irked her.

He showed her the bag on the mantelshelf: "I've brought you some iced chestnuts."

She clapped her hands delightedly: "How nice! What a darling you are!" Taking one and tasting it she said: "They're delicious. I don't think I shall leave a single one;" then with a sensuous glance at Georges: "You cater for all my weaknesses."

She went on eating the chestnuts slowly with an eye all the time on the bottom of the bag to see whether there were any left.

"Now you sit on the couch and I'll sit on the stool and finish them all;" and he obeyed smiling to see her cuddled at his knees just as Mme Walter had been an hour earlier.

She raised her head to speak to him, her mouth full.

"Do you know darling, I've been dreaming of you. I

dreamt that we were on a long journey just the two of us, mounted on a camel. He had two humps, we were each seated on one of them and were crossing the desert. We had brought sandwiches in a bag and wine in a bottle and were picnicking on our humps. But I didn't like it because we couldn't do anything; we were too far apart, so I wanted to get down."

He answered: "I too, I want to get down."

He laughed, amused at her little story and led her on, encouraging her chatter and childish antics, all the tender stupidities that lovers indulge in. The same prattling that he loved in the mouth of Mme de Marelle was what exasperated him coming from Mme Walter.

Clotilde had just the same trick of calling him. "My little boy, my darling, my babby," and the words sounded sweet and caressing. Said by the other woman an hour earlier they had bored and irritated him. For the vocabulary of love, always identical, imbibes the flavour of the lips from whence it comes.

But even while he was enjoying her chatter, his thoughts were with the seventy thousand francs he was going to earn and he abruptly stopped her by two little taps on the head with his fingers: "Listen, my pet. I'm going to entrust you with a commission to your husband. Tell him, from me, to invest to-morrow ten thousand francs in the Morocco loan which is now at seventy-two, and I promise that he will make from sixty to eighty thousand francs within three months. Impose absolute silence on him. Tell him from me that the Tangier expedition is definitely decided on and that the French State is going to guarantee the whole Moroccan debt. Mind he's not to say a word. It's a State secret that I'm trusting him with."

She listened attentively: "Thank you. I will tell my husband this evening. You can rely on him; he won't say a word. There is no fear of that, he is a very dependable man."

She had eaten all the chestnuts by now and, squeezing the paper bag in her hands, threw it into the grate. Then she said: "Come, let's lie down," and without rising began to unbutton Georges' waistcoat.

Suddenly she stopped and drawing between her fingers a long hair she had taken from a button, began to laugh: "Well! well! So you're carrying about a hair of Madeleine's. There's a faithful husband for you!"

Then her face changed and became thoughtful while she carefully examined the long almost imperceptible thread she had found: "This is not Madeleine's, it is dark brown."

He smiled: "Probably the chamber-maid's." But she was now scrutinizing his waistcoat as carefully as a detective investigating a crime and unrolled another hair from a second button; then she saw a third. Pale and beginning to tremble she cried: "Oh! you've been to bed with a woman and she has twined these hairs round every button."

Perfectly amazed he mumbled: "Certainly not. How silly you are..." Suddenly he remembered the incident. It made him a little uneasy at first, then he chuckled, not altogether displeased that she should suspect him of other conquests.

She went on searching and found hair after hair which she feverishly disentangled and threw on the floor.

With a woman's instinct she guessed everything and flew into a frantic rage storming hysterically at him:

"That woman loves you...and she wants you to carry something of hers about with you.... Oh! you vile traitor..."

She gave a shrill triumphant scream.

"Ah!...Ah!...so she is an old woman...here is a white hair.... So you take an old woman nowadays, do you!...I suppose they pay you...tell me, do they pay you?... So you prefer old women...then you don't need me...go to her..."

She rose and running for her blouse which she had thrown across a chair began to put it on rapidly.

He was nonplussed but tried to stop her: "No! no!...Clo... You're all wrong... I had no idea that it was...listen... don't go...please sit down."

She would have none of it and kept repeating:

"Stick to your old woman...hang on to her...make yourself a ring with her hair...her white hair...you have enough of it for that..." With quick violent gestures she dressed

herself and put on her hat and veil; and as he tried to detain her slapped his face vigorously, wrenched the door open and fled leaving him dumbfounded, ludicrously discomfited and muttering dire reprisals against "that old cow of a Mother Walter," whom he would put in her place once and for all and none too gently either. He bathed his smarting face in cold water and flung out of the flat swearing vengeance. This time he would not forgive her; no, he would teach her her place.

Walking slowly down the boulevard he stopped before a jeweller's shop window looking at a chronometer which he had wanted for a long time, marked at eighteen hundred francs. His reflections became more cheerful. If he made that seventy thousand francs he could buy it. He gloated over what he could do with such a sum. First he would secure nomination as a deputy, then he would buy the chronometer, then dabble on 'change, then...

He wanted to keep away from the office and avoid seeing Walter till after he had talked things over with Madeleine and written his article, so he turned towards home.

At la rue Drouot he pulled up sharply; he had forgotten all about his promised call on the Count de Vaudrec. So he turned back and made for the Count's house in Chaussée-d'-Autin, at a leisurely pace, his mind full of pleasurable reflections and anticipations, the coming fortune, the outsmarting of the unspeakable Laroche, the discomfiture of that old shrew la Patronne. He was no longer much perturbed by Clotilde's wrath, feeling fairly certain that she would forgive him.

At the Count's house, he asked the concierge to take in his card.

"How is M de Vaudrec? I hear he has not been well the last few days." The man replied: "His Excellency is desperately ill, monsieur. He is not expected to live through the night, the gout has reached his heart."

Du Roy was so taken aback that he did not know what he was doing. Vaudrec dying! A crowd of vague, confused, disturbing thoughts began to harass his mind, thoughts that he dared not own, even to himself.

"Thanks...I shall return..." He spoke mechanically without knowing what he was saying; then hailed a cab and went straight home.

His wife had returned and was in her room. He blurted out his news at once.

"Have you heard? Vaudrec is dying."

She was sitting down, reading a letter and raised her eyes abstractedly repeating: "Hello! you were saying...you were saying?"

"I am saying that Vaudrec is dying from an attack of gout touching the heart;" then he added, "what do you intend doing?"

Her whole body stiffened. Her face went livid and began to twitch convulsively. She broke into passionate weeping, hiding her face on her hands and sat there shaking with sobs, grief-stricken.

Quite suddenly she became mistress of herself again and dried her eyes.

"I must...I must go there.... Don't worry about me... I don't know what time I shall be back.... Don't wait for me."

He answered: "Of course. Go." They clasped hands and she was gone, so hastily that she forgot to take her gloves with her.

Having dined alone Georges began writing his article, exactly following the minister's instructions, giving his readers to understand that the Morocco expedition would not take place. He took it to the journal, had a few minutes' chat with the director and left smoking and in high spirits, without quite knowing why.

His wife had not returned. He went to bed and slept soundly.

It was towards midnight when Madeleine came back. Georges was abruptly awakened to find her sitting on the side of the bed.

"Well?"

He had never seen her so pale and stricken. She murmured:

"He is dead."

"Ah! And...did he say anything to you?"

"Nothing. He was unconscious when I arrived."

Georges was thoughtful. There are questions one longs to ask but dare not.

"Lie down," he advised her.

She undressed quickly and glided in beside him.

He resumed: "Were there any relations at his bed-side?"

"None, except one nephew."

"Ah! Did he often see him, this nephew?"

"Never. They had not met for ten years."

"Had he any other relations?"

"No...I don't think so."

"Then...it is this nephew who will inherit?"

"I don't know."

"Was Vaudrec very rich?"

"Yes, very wealthy."

"Have you any idea, what he was worth, roughly?"

"No, not for certain. One or two millions perhaps."

He said no more. She extinguished the lamp; and they lay, extended, side by side in the night, silent, wakeful, pondering.

He had no wish to sleep. The seventy thousand francs promised by Mme Walter sounded paltry now. Suddenly he got the idea that Madeleine was weeping. He felt he must know and spoke to her to find out.

"Are you asleep?"

"No."

Her voice was broken and trembling.

"I forgot to tell you, just now, that your minister has been fooling us both."

"In what way?"

And he told her fully and in detail the swindle contrived between Laroche and Walter.

When he had finished she asked him: "How do you know all this?"

"You must permit me not to disclose that. You have sources of information which I don't have access to. I have mine too, which I wish to keep to myself. But I am completely

sure of my ground in this case."

She murmured thoughtfully:

"Yes. It's quite possible. I myself have had my suspicions that they were planning something between them." But Georges' thoughts were now elsewhere. He was not in the least sleepy. He had drawn closer to his wife and very softly pressed a kiss on her ear. She sharply repulsed him: "Leave me alone, can't you? I'm in no mood for that sort of thing."

And Georges resignedly turned his face to the wall, and closing his eyes, ended by sleeping soundly after all.

CHAPTER VI

THE Church was draped in black, and over the west door a huge escutcheon surmounted by a coronet proclaimed to the world that a nobleman was being buried.

The service had just ended and the congregation was filing slowly past the coffin and by the Count de Vaudrec's nephew, who was shaking hands and acknowledging condolences.

Leaving the Church Georges du Roy and his wife walked slowly homeward together, silent and preoccupied.

At length Georges muttered as if to himself:

"It is really most surprising."

Madeleine took him up.

"What is, dear?"

"That Vaudrec has not left anything to us!"

She blushed vividly as if a pink veil had suddenly been stretched across her white skin.

"Why should he have left us anything? There was not the least reason why he should."

Then after a little reflection she added:

"Perhaps some lawyer has a will. We shan't know for a while."

He considered this likely.

"Yes, probably so, for he was our best friend—best friend to both of us, I mean. He dined twice a week at our place and came and went at all times. It was a home from home to him, actually his real home. He loved you like a father, and he had no family, no children, no brothers or sisters, only one solitary nephew and a very distant one at that. Yes, he ought to have made a will. I don't look for anything big, just a souvenir as a token that he thought of us, that he loved us and acknowledged the regard we had for him. Some mark of affection for us both."

She said, with an abstracted, indifferent air:

"Well, there is the possibility that he left a will."

Entering their house they found a note awaiting them. It

was addressed to Madeleine. She opened it and handed it to her husband.

M LAMANEUR
SOLICITOR,
17, rue des Vosges.

Madame,

I shall be obliged if you will give me a call on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday between the hours of two and four on private business concerning yourself.

Yours etc.
LAMANEUR.

It was Georges' turn to redden and he did: "Upon my word, that's odd. It is strange that it should be you he sends for and not for me, when I am the legal head of the family."

She answered nothing at first and, when she did, ignored the point.

"Would you like us to go there now?"

"Yes, that's the best way."

At M Lamaneur's office the head clerk received them with marked deference and at once showed them into his principal's room.

The notary was a tubby little man completely round. His head looked like a ball fixed on to another ball and his stocky legs were so small and short that they seemed to make a third.

He shook hands, indicated chairs and turned to Madeleine.

"Madame, I have asked you to call to inform you of the Count de Vaudrec's will, which concerns yourself."

Georges, unable to keep quiet, muttered: "Just what I feared."

The lawyer went on: "I am going to read it to you. It is quite short."

He drew a sheet of paper from a file and read its contents aloud: "'I the undersigned Paul Emile Cyprien Gontran, Count de Vaudrec being of sound mind and body declare this to be my last will.

" 'Death being likely to bear us away at any moment I wish in anticipation of that event to take the precaution of making this my will which will be deposited with M Lamaneur.

" 'Not having any direct heirs I leave my whole fortune comprising in personal estate some six hundred thousand francs and my real estate comprising in value some five hundred thousand francs to Mme Claire-Madeleine du Roy for her absolute property. I beg her to accept this gift from a dead friend as a proof of his devoted, profound and respectful affection.' "

The solicitor added: "That's all. This will is dated in the month of August last and replaces another exactly similar document made two years ago in favour of Mme Claire-Madeleine Forestier. I hold the first will and in case of any litigation on the part of the family, it will prove that the wishes of M the Count de Vaudr  c have in no way changed."

Madeleine, very pale, was looking at her feet; Georges was nervously tugging at his moustache. After a moment's silence the lawyer resumed: "I suppose you are aware, Monsieur, that your wife cannot accept this bequest without your legal consent."

Du Roy rose and then said coldly: "I must have time to think it over."

The lawyer gave smiling assent and added pleasantly: "I quite understand your scruples and why you hesitate, Monsieur. I may add that the Count's nephew whom I informed of his uncle's last wishes, this morning expressed himself as quite willing to accept the will, provided Madame will allow him one hundred thousand francs out of the estate. In my opinion the will is unassailable but, if it is contested, it will mean publicity and scandal which it would be just as well to avoid. The world generally puts an evil construction on things. In any event perhaps you will let me know your decision on the whole matter by Saturday."

Georges bowed with stiff formality. His wife had not spoken a word. He ushered her out and left the office with such obvious perturbation that the solicitor was no longer smiling.

At home, Georges slammed the door, threw his hat on the bed and bluntly challenged his wife:

"You were de Vaudrec's mistress?"

Madeleine had raised her veil. She turned sharply.

"What! I?"

"Yes, you! No one leaves his whole estate to a woman except when..."

Her fingers were trembling so violently that she could not remove the pins tying her veil.

She thought for a moment, then said agitatedly:

"Come...come...you are mad...you are...you are...why only a little while ago you yourself were hoping he would leave you something."

Georges stood facing her, watching every gesture, every emotion like a magistrate seeking to surprise a criminal in the least admission. Emphasizing each word, he said:

"Yes...to me...he would have left something to me...to me, your husband...to me, his friend...note the difference...to me...but not to you...to you a woman friend...to you..., my wife. The distinction is all important, vital from the point of view of decency...and of public opinion."

Madeleine, in her turn, was gazing at him fixedly, straight in the eyes, with singular and profound concentration, as if she were trying to read something there, to probe into that unexplored region of the mind that no one ever penetrates and of which one very rarely obtains a bare glimpse in fleeting seconds, in unguarded moments of recklessness or inattention, those moments which are like doors left half open to the mysteries of the soul within. She spoke very slowly:

"On the other hand it seems to me that if...that people might find it just as peculiar if he had left a legacy of that size...to you."

He demanded sharply:

"Why?"

"Because"—she hesitated then went on—"because you are my husband...because you have known him only a little while...because I have been his friend for a very long time...because his first will made when Forestier was alive was in my favour

too."

Georges was pacing up and down with long strides. He declared:

"You cannot accept it."

She answered with calm indifference:

"Exactly: and it's not worth while waiting till Saturday: we can let M Lamaneur know at once."

He halted abruptly, facing her; and, again they stood, each pair of eyes searching the other, striving to fathom the innermost secrets of their hearts, to sound the very depths of thought. They tried to strip conscience naked in one burning unspoken question: an intimate struggle between two beings living side by side, each going its own way, suspecting, divining, lying in wait for one another yet not knowing the muddy waters of either soul.

He lowered his voice, almost whispering the words:

"Come now, admit that you were de Vaudrec's mistress?"

She shrugged her shoulders: "You are being childish... Vaudrec liked me very much, very much indeed...but nothing more...ever."

His foot rapped the ground.

"You are lying. It is not possible."

She was quite unperturbed.

"Nevertheless it is true."

He strode up and down the room again; then pulled up.

"In that case perhaps you will explain to me why he bequeathed his entire fortune to you...to you alone."

She answered with matter-of-fact nonchalance.

"It's quite simple really. As you said just now he had no real friends except ourselves, or rather except myself for he had known me from childhood. My mother was lady companion to his parents. He was a constant visitor to our house and, as he had no natural heir he thought of me. Perhaps he was a little in love with me, it's quite possible. Show me the woman who has never been loved in that way. It may be that this concealed secret devotion led him to put down my name when he was writing his will. Why not? He used to bring me flowers every Monday. You were in no way put out at

that, were you, or at the fact that he never gave you anything? Now he has given me his fortune for the same reason and because he had no one else to leave it to. Why shouldn't he give it to me? But on the other hand it really would have been astonishing if he had left it to you. Why should he? You were nothing to him."

She spoke so naturally and frankly that Georges was nonplussed.

"None the less," he said, "it is out of the question for us to accept this bequest under the present conditions. It would have most deplorable results. Everyone will believe the worst, they will all laugh and jeer at me. My colleagues in the paper are even now inclined to be jealous and backbiting. I have to be more than careful of my honour and reputation. It is impossible for me to allow my wife to accept a legacy of this kind from a man whom public rumour has already assumed to be her lover. Forestier might have tolerated all that but I will not. That's definite."

She murmured sweetly: "Just so! Very well, my dear, let's decline it. It will only be a million or so less in our pockets, that's all."

He continued his mechanical patrol, beginning to think aloud, talking at his wife, not to her.

"Hum! yes...a million...it's hard lines.... He didn't understand what tactlessness and disregard of the conventions he was displaying. He didn't realize in what a false ridiculous position he was placing me.... Life is all a matter of proportion.... He could easily have left me half of it, then there would have been no trouble."

He sat down, crossed his legs, and began twisting his moustache, his invariable habit when bored, worried or considering an awkward problem.

Madeleine took up some knitting and began choosing the wool with serene composure. She said calmly:

"Well, I'm not saying any more. You can do the thinking."

He was a long time replying and when he did it was with marked hesitation.

"Society will never understand de Vaudrec leaving you everything and my acquiescing in it. To receive his fortune in that way will be tantamount to admitting...to admitting a guilty relationship on your part and a disgraceful connivance at it on mine. Just think what sort of interpretation everyone will place on it. We must find a way out, a clever means of glossing things over. For instance we could give it out that he left it to us share and share alike, half to the husband and half to the wife."

She objected: "I don't see how we can do that. A will is a formal document, it's on record."

"Oh! That doesn't matter. It's quite simple. You could make over half the inheritance to me by deed of gift. In that way we should close the mouth of spiteful rumour."

She answered a little impatiently: "I still don't see how that is going to close the mouth of anyone. The will is there, a public document, signed by Vaudrec."

"Good Heavens!" he said testily. "Are we going to flourish the will in their faces or paste it on the walls? You are rather dense my dear. We shall say that the Count de Vaudrec left us his estate, real and personal in two equal shares.... That's all.... Remember you cannot accept the legacy at all without my sanction. I will not give it, except on condition that I receive a half share which will prevent me becoming a public laughing stock."

Her level gaze pierced him through and through.

"Very well. I agree."

He got up, walking about the room again, and proclaimed fresh misgivings, appearing to hesitate still and carefully avoiding his wife's searching eyes.

"No...decidedly not...perhaps the best thing will be to renounce the whole legacy...it will be more dignified...more proper...more honourable...yet by this scheme no one can suggest a thing...absolutely not a thing. The most strait-laced puritan will not be able to say a word against it."

He stopped before Madeleine: "All right dear, if you like I'll go alone to M Lamaneur and consult him and explain things. I shall tell him of my scruples and add that we have

devised the idea of sharing equally to comply with the conventions, so that no one can criticize us. From the moment that I accept half the legacy myself it is obvious that not a soul has the right to sneer. It is practically an announcement by me: 'My wife accepts, because I accept, her husband who is the judge of what she can do without compromising herself!' Otherwise there would certainly be a scandal."

Madeleine answered quietly: "I see. I understand you perfectly. Do as you like."

He went on talking quickly: "Yes, the plan of sharing, half each, makes everything as clear as day. We jointly inherit from a friend who wished to show no difference, no distinction between us, who didn't want to give the impression to anyone of saying: 'I prefer one to the other after my death, just as I did during my life.' He liked the wife the better of the two, admitted, but by dividing his fortune between them equally he wanted to emphasize that his preference was purely platonic. And very likely, if he had thought it over carefully that is actually what he would have done. He didn't think, didn't foresee the consequences."

She stopped him, a shade irritated: "You are perfectly clear. I understand you. There is no need for all these protestations. Go to the solicitor at once."

He flushed and faltered: "You are right, I'll go now."

He took his hat. At the door he turned back.

"I'll try to settle with the nephew for fifty thousand francs."

She looked, suddenly, discomfited and ashamed: "No, no we will share. If we give him fifty thousand each, we still divide a million clear between us."

And with a final "Au revoir my little Made," he went off and explained the plan to the lawyer, pretending that the whole idea was his wife's.

The next day a deed of gift was executed by which Madeleine du Roy made over five hundred thousand francs to her husband.

It was a fine afternoon and as they left the lawyer's office Georges suggested a stroll along the boulevards. He was

demonstrative, in high spirits, conciliatory and affectionate; she was thoughtful and rather cold.

It was a sharp autumn day. Georges led his wife to the shop window, in which he had so often gazed at his longed-for chronometer.

"Will you let me offer you a present?" he asked her.

"If you want to." Her reply was indifferent.

They went inside.

"What would you like best, a necklace, a bracelet or a pair of earrings?" The sight of the gold trinkets and precious stones dispelled her coldness and her eyes were bright and curious as they ran over the show-case, full of expensive jewels.

"That's a lovely bracelet," she said eagerly. It was a quaint, bizarre chain with a different stone for every link.

"How much is this bracelet?" asked Georges.

"Three thousand francs, Monsieur."

"If you'll let it go at two thousand five hundred, I'll take it."

The jeweller hesitated and then said it was impossible.

Du Roy tried him again. "Wait, you can add this chronometer for fifteen hundred francs, that makes four thousand and I'll pay you cash. Is it a deal? If not, I'll go elsewhere."

The perplexed jeweller ended by agreeing. "All right; have it your own way, Monsieur;" and the journalist after giving his address, added: "Please have my initials engraved on it, 'G.R.C.' and above them a baron's coronet."

Madeleine was surprised and amused, and as they left the shop, she took his arm with a certain affection. After all, he was really smart and alert and now that he was a man of property, it was only right that he should have a little to go with it.

The shopkeeper saluted them obsequiously: "You can rely on me. It will be ready by Thursday M le baron."

They passed the Vaudeville, where there was a new play on. "Would you like to see the show to-night?" he asked her and she accepted the suggestion.

"We will dine in the Cabaret," he said. He was as happy

as a king and sought some additional diversion.

"We might call on Mme de Marelle. if you like; her husband is here and I should like to have a chat with him. We might ask them to join us."

They called. Georges, who was rather dreading meeting his mistress again, was not displeased that his wife would be present and save the necessity of explanations; but Clotilde seemed to recollect nothing and made her husband accept the invitation.

The dinner was a success and they spent a delightful evening.

* Georges and Madeleine returned late. The gas was off and Georges lighted their way up the stairs by matches.

On the first floor landing, the sudden flare of a match showed up both of them in the staircase mirror.

Springing out of the shadows they looked like two phantoms about to vanish into the night.

Du Roy raised his hand to show their reflections more clearly.

He said with a triumphant laugh.

"Behold two millionaires pass by."

CHAPTER VII

THE conquest of Morocco was two months old. France, mistress of Tangier, now owned the whole African Mediterranean coast as far as Tripoli and she had guaranteed the debt of her newly annexed colony.

Rumour had it that two Cabinet ministers had made something in the neighbourhood of twenty millions out of the venture, and was particularly busy with the name of Laroche-Mathieu.

As regards Walter all Paris knew that he had brought off a double coup and had cashed in between thirty and forty millions on the loan, plus from eight to ten millions in the copper and iron mines, and also had made enormous sums from immense territories, bought before the conquest for a song, and resold, immediately after the French occupation to colonization companies.

In a matter of a few days he had become a world figure, one of those omnipotent financiers to whom obsequious heads bow, whom fawning tongues flatter, who draw out all that is mean and base and vile in the human heart. No longer was he the Jew Walter, boss of a shady bank, director of a dubious newspaper, deputy suspected of jobbery and corruption. He was Monsieur Walter the wealthy Israelite.

And now he wanted to show it.

Knowing that the Prince of Karlsburg who owned one of the finest mansions in the rue de Faubourg Saint-Honoré, with a garden looking on the Champs-Élysées was in need of money, he made the prince an offer for it, furnished, as it stood. His offer was three millions, and the prince tempted by the sum, accepted it.

The following day the Walters moved in.

Then he had another idea, a truly Napoleonic inspiration to draw all Paris to his new domain.

Society was flocking to see a wonderful painting by the great Hungarian artist Karl Marcowitch on view at the gal-

leries of the expert, Jacques Lenoble; the picture was one of Christ walking on the sea. The art critics unanimously proclaimed it to be the masterpiece of the century.

Walter bought it for five hundred thousand francs and took it away, thus abruptly bringing the daily stream of visitors to an end, and forcing himself on the attention of an indignant public.

Then he announced in the press that on a particular evening, everyone of any standing in society was invited to his house to view the supreme masterpiece of the foreign genius, so that no one could complain that he had isolated a work of art.

His house would be open, free to all who cared to come. All that was necessary was to produce an invitation card at the door.

His advertisement ran: "Monsieur and Madame Walter have pleasure in inviting you to a private view, at their residence on the thirtieth December from nine o'clock to midnight, of the painting by Karl Marcowitch 'Jesus walking on the waters' illuminated by electric light."

A postscript followed in small print: "Dancing after midnight." Those who wanted to, would stay on for the dance and from these the Walter family would recruit their acquaintances of the morrow. The rest would come only to view the masterpiece and would leave as soon as they had done so, regarding the mansion and its new occupants with contemptuous indifference. But Daddy Walter knew that they would eventually drift back as they did to his brother Israelites once they became rich. All he had to do was to get these titled nonentities whose photographs adorned the illustrated weeklies to set foot once in his house. And they would all do it partly out of curiosity to set eyes on the man who had made eighty millions in six weeks; partly to see and size up the other visitors; and partly because he had had the good taste and tact to invite them to admire an essentially Christian picture in the home of a son of Israel.

He might as well have advertised: "See, I have paid five hundred thousand francs for the Christian masterpiece of

Marcowitch, 'Jesus walking on the sea', and it belongs to me, will be always under my eyes, in my house, the house of Walter, the Jew."

Society, however, that Society of duchesses and jockeys did not concern itself with any ironical aspect of the invitation. It would go there as it would to an exhibition of water colours at M Petits: the Walters owned a work of art, on a certain evening they would open their doors for Society to view it, and Society would go. That was all.

The *Vie Française*, for fifteen days published a "puff" in its Gossip column of the approaching event and kept public curiosity alive.

Du Roy fumed at his director's triumph.

He had believed himself wealthy with the five hundred thousand francs out of which he had swindled his wife, but now he considered himself poor, dreadfully poor, comparing his modest fortune with the shower of millions which had been poured around the other man who had done nothing whatever to earn it.

His jealous wrath increased daily. He raged inwardly against everyone—the Walters whose house he now sedulously avoided, his wife who, deceived by Laroche had dissuaded him from investing in the Morocco loan, and, above all against the minister who had fooled him, used him as a tool, and who twice a week was still dining at his table. Georges served him as secretary, agent and mouthpiece, and when writing at Laroche's dictation he felt an insane desire to strangle the triumphant dandy. As a minister Laroche was a moderate success and to keep his portfolio had to conceal the fact that he was now stuffed with gold.

But du Roy, sensed this gold day by day in the parvenu lawyer's haughtier manner, his more insolent gestures, his more arrogant speech, his complete self-assurance.

Georges, simmering with rage, put up with it like a dog which wants to bite but dares not. But he was often curt and harsh towards Madeleine who merely shrugged her shoulders indifferently and treated like an unruly child. She was, however, surprised at his constant ill humour and some-

times commented on it: "I can't understand you. You are grumbling all the time. Yet your position is really magnificent." He would turn his back, without reply.

At first he had truculently declared that he would not go to the director's fête and that he would not set foot in the lousy Jew's house. For the past two months, Mme Walter had been inundating him with daily letters, begging him to come to her, to make an appointment where and when he pleased, so that, as she told him, she could hand over to him the seventy thousand francs that she had earned for him. He never replied and threw her desperate effusions into the fire. Not that he had the least intention of giving up his share of their joint profits, but he wanted to madden her, ill-treat her, trample her under his feet. She was too wealthy! He wanted to put her in her place.

On the evening of the private view Madeleine urged that he was making a great mistake by keeping away.

"Drop the subject," he replied peevishly: "I'm not going."

After dinner he suddenly veered round.

"After all it's a necessary ordeal and we shall have to go through it. Get ready quickly."

She had been expecting the change of front.

"I'll be ready in fifteen minutes," she said.

He grumbled all the time he was dressing and even in the carriage went on growling and sulking.

The courtyard of the Karlsburgh mansion was illuminated in its four corners by four electric globes looking like four little blush moons. A magnificent carpet covered the steps of the stone stairway leading into the house on each of which was stationed a man in livery motionless as a statue.

Du Roy muttered: "What a circus," and shrugged his shoulders, consumed with envy.

His wife answered sharply: "Be quiet and behave yourself."

They went inside and handed their outer garments to waiting footmen.

Several women were there with their husbands taking off their furs.

"Quite a good show, quite impressive," they were saying.

The vestibule was hung with tapestries portraying the story of Mars and Venus. Facing the visitors on the right and left were the banisters of a monumental staircase leading to the first floor.

Just inside the salons two little girls, one in pink, the other in blue, presented bouquets to the ladies. They looked very charming.

There was already a large crowd in the reception rooms.

Most of the women were in afternoon dress as though to emphasize that they had merely attended in the same way as they would any other private exhibition. Those remaining for the ball wore evening frocks.

Mme Walter, a group of her friends round her, was in the second salon receiving the visitors of whom quite a number ignored her, strolling about as if they were in a museum and not taking the least notice of the owners of the house.

As soon as she caught sight of du Roy she turned livid, took an impulsive step towards him and then stopped, waiting for him. He greeted her stiffly while Madeleine congratulated her warmly.

Then Georges, leaving his wife with la Patronne lost himself in the crowd to listen to the spiteful comments he was certain were being made.

There were five salons sumptuously furnished, decorated with Italian frescos and priceless oriental rugs, their walls hung with paintings by old masters. The whole made a scene of barbaric splendour.

Georges recognized celebrities everywhere, the Duchess of Terracina, the count and countess de Ravenel, general the prince d'Andremont, the famous and beautiful marquise des Dunes, the élite of fashionable Paris.

Someone caught his arm and a fresh happy young voice whispered in his ear: "Ah! There you are at last, naughty Bel-Ami. Why is it we never see you nowadays?"

He was delighted to see her again and cordially grasped her hand while he made his excuses.

"I couldn't manage it. I have been so busy the last two months that I never got out at all."

She took him up seriously: "It is naughty of you, very naughty, very naughty indeed. We have been really worried about you, for we are very fond of you, Mamma and I. As for myself I simply can't get along without you. If you are not about I am bored to death. There! Now I've spoken out straight to you so that you won't have the right to disappear like that again. Give me your arm, I'm going to show you 'Jesus walking upon the waters' myself; it is outside behind the conservatory. Papa put it there so that everyone should be compelled to go through the whole mansion. It's amazing, papa is as vain as a peacock over the place."

They walked slowly through the throng. Several turned to look after the handsome young man and the bright doll-like girl: "Look! what a fine couple," and similar admiring comments followed them.

Georges was thinking: "If only I had the sense, this is the one I should have married. It could have been managed somehow. Why did it never occur to me? How did I let myself get landed with the other? What madness! It's always the same with me; acting too quickly and never thinking it out!" And envy, bitter rancorous regret, gnawed at his mind like a canker, bit by bit devouring his peace of mind making his life hateful.

Suzanne's voice interrupted his ugly reflections: "Come often, Bel-Ami, we'll have fun now papa is so rich. We'll have the time of our lives."

His train of thought appeared in his reply: "Oh! you'll get married now. You will wed some noble prince, a little less worse for wear and we shall see no more of one another."

She answered impetuously: "No I shan't. Not yet. I want someone I like, someone I like very much, someone I shall be head over heels in love with. I shall be rich enough for both."

His smile became sarcastic and sneering and he started pointing out to her several of the gentlemen present, bearers of ancient noble names who had trafficked their soiled titles for financiers' daughters like herself and who now flourished, with their wives or separated from them, free, impudent,

accepted and respected everywhere.

"I don't give you six months before you'll swallow that bait. You will become Madame la Marquise, Madame la Duchesse, or even Madame la Princesse and you will look down on me from a very lofty height, mademoiselle."

She became very indignant and tapped his arm with her fan vowing that she would marry only as her heart told her.

He laughed: "We shall see all about that; you are far too wealthy."

"But you also, you have come into money surely!"
 "Rubbish," he answered contemptuously. "Not worth speaking about. A paltry twenty thousand pounds of landed property. Almost a bagatelle nowadays."

"But your wife has inherited as well?"

"Yes, a million between us both. An income of forty thousand. We can barely afford to keep a carriage on it."

They had reached the last salon and facing them, opening on to the conservatory was a large winter garden full of weird trees and ferns from the Far East and masses of rare orchids and exotic plants. Du Roy suddenly noticed on his left, under a heavy canopy of palm trees, a huge white marble basin as big as a swimming bath upon the sides of which four great Delftware swans poured water from their half open beaks.

Powdered golden sand was at the bottom of this tank and swimming about in it were enormous red fishes, bizarre Chinese monsters with protruding staring eyes and scales tipped with blue, mandarins of the deep standing grotesquely out against the gold background.

The splendour of the whole scene made the journalist actually stare. "Yes," he told himself. "This is the real thing; this is luxury. This is the sort of house I ought to live in. Others are hovels beside it. Why can't I get there?"

His mind roamed vainly over various fantastic impossibilities and he became exasperated at his own impotence.

His companion became silent and pensive; looking at her covertly the thought occurred again to him: "What I should have done was to have married this lively little marionette."

Suzanne suddenly livened up again: "Come on," she said, pushing Georges through the crowd and making him turn sharply to the right. In the midst of an arbour of rare plants with gently swaying leaves extended like tiny fingers of miniature hands one saw a man standing motionless upon the sea.

The effect was marvellous in its beauty. The background showed the apostles in their little vessel, dimly visible in the slanting rays of a lantern which one of them held and of which the full light fell upon Jesus, walking towards them.

Christ was advancing his foot upon a shadow hollow which was yielding, gently submissive, and caressing the divine tread. All was dark round the Man who is God, save for the stars shining in the heavens. The apostles in the faint light of the lantern, which one of them was holding towards the Lord, seemed petrified with amazement.

It was indeed the supreme breath-taking achievement of a great artist, one of those masterpieces which confound the imagination and dwell in the mind for years.

Even this sorry crowd were momentarily abashed and silent before they began to speculate on the pecuniary value of the picture.

Du Roy after contemplating it for some time observed: "It's nice to have the money to pay for these nick-nacks;" and keeping Suzanne's little hand on his arm, pushed his way out of the jostling crowd.

She asked him: "Would you care for a glass of champagne? Let's go to the buffet. We shall find Papa there." They worked their way back through all the salons and the rapidly swelling mob.

Suddenly Georges heard his own name pronounced:

"It is Laroche and Mme du Roy."

The words brushed his ear lightly like sounds from afar carried by the breeze. Who had spoken them?

His eyes wandered everywhere at once and he saw his wife go by on the minister's arm. They were smiling, talking in low intimate tones, and gazing at one another.

The thought struck him that everyone was sniggering and looking at the couple and he felt a brutal mad impulse to leap

at them both and beat them to death with his bare fists.

So, she was making a laughing-stock of him! His thoughts rushed back to Forestier. Perhaps they were now saying: "That cuckold of a du Roy." Who was she, after all, this wife of his? A clever, jumped up little nobody, and not particularly wealthy either. People came to her house because they feared her, because they knew she could pull strings and because they could let themselves go and talk freely in a journalist's home. He would never get far in the world with this woman who made his house suspect, who was compromising herself all the time, whose very beauty and allure proclaimed the intriguer. She was now a millstone round his neck. Ah! If he had only known, if only he had looked ahead! He would have played for higher stakes for wealthier game!

What he could have won with this little Suzanne here, as the stake! What an incredible fool he had been not to have understood that! They came to the dining hall, an immense room with marble columns, hung with ancient Gobelin tapestries.

Walter welcomed his foreign editor vociferously. He was beside himself with happiness: "Have you seen everything? Suzanne, have you shown him everything? All society is here, Bel-Ami, isn't it? Have you seen the Prince of Guerche? He has just had a drink of punch with me."

He darted off to Rissolin the senator who was trailing his common overdressed wife along like a walking shop.

A gentleman saluted Suzanne, a slim, fairhaired gentleman, a little bald with that air of worldly breeding that one instinctively recognizes. Georges knew him by repute; the Marquis de Cazolles, and was instantly jealous of the man. How long had the marquis condescended to know her? Since her fortune of course. Georges saw in him, a suitor. Someone took his arm. It was Norbert de Varenne. The old poet looked tired and was aimlessly wandering round with his greasy hair and more greasy clothes, bored and indifferent.

"This is what they call enjoyment," he remarked. "Presently they will dance; then they will go to bed; and the little ladies will be satisfied. Take some champagne. It's quite good."

He filled his own glass and one for du Roy; then toasted him: "I drink to the revenge of Intellect upon Wealth." He added pleasantly: "Not that wealth annoys me in others or that I envy them. I merely lodge my protest on principle."

Georges was not listening. He was looking for Suzanne who had slipped off with the Marquis de Cazolles, and abruptly leaving Norbert de Varenne he disappeared to find her.

A throng of thirsty individuals blocked his way and when he got free he turned and found himself face to face with the de Marelles.

He was constantly meeting the wife, but had not seen the husband for a considerable time. M de Marelle was effusively grateful.

"My dear fellow," he said. "How can I thank you sufficiently for the advice you gave me through Clotilde? I made nearly a hundred thousand francs over the Morocco loan. I owe it all to you. You are indeed a loyal friend."

Some of the men were gazing appreciatively at the elegantly turned out, pretty brunette. Du Roy answered: "In return for that service, Monsieur, I am taking your wife, or, I should say, I am offering her my arm. One should always separate married couples."

M de Marelle bowed: "That's quite fair. If I lose you we will meet here in an hour's time."

The two young people lost themselves in the crowd, followed by the husband.

"The Walters are in luck's way," said Clotilde. "What it is to have advance information of coming events!"

Georges answered: "Bah! A man with audacity can always get there one way or another." She spoke of the daughters.

"There are two girls worth from twenty to thirty millions each, without counting that Suzanne is really pretty."

He made no reply. His own thoughts coming from someone else, annoyed him.

She had not yet seen the painting and he suggested taking her there. They passed the time with sardonic comments on the passers-by. Saint-Potin went by and amused them greatly by the sight of his breast covered with decorations; a vener-

able ambassador just behind him, wore far fewer.

"Behold, the cream of society," sneered du Roy.

Boisrenard shook hands with them, adorned with the same green and yellow ribbon he had worn on the morning of the duel.

The Viscountess de Percemur, enormous and resplendent, was chatting with a duke in the little Louis XVI boudoir.

"Tête-à-tête in high life," commented Georges.

Crossing the conservatory he caught sight of his wife, sitting close to Laroche-Mathieu, both of them almost hidden behind thick ferns. They might as well have proclaimed aloud: "Here we are engrossed in one another in a public place. For we defy the conventions."

Mme de Marelle having conceded the fact that Karl Marcowitch's Jesus was "quite remarkable," they returned to find no sign of her husband.

"And Laurine, does she still dislike me these days?"

"Yes, more than ever. She declines to meet you and walks out of the room if anyone mentions your name."

He didn't answer. The sudden hatred of the child grieved and hurt him. Suzanne jumped out at them from a doorway.

"Ah! There you are. Bel-Ami you're going to be left on your own. I'm taking la belle Clotilde off to show her my room;" and the two ladies left him gliding across the room with that undulating snakelike wriggle we reserve for crowds.

A voice close to him whispered: "Georges!" It was Mme Walter. She went on in low agitated tones: "How brutally cruel you are! I told Suzette to bring you along with your companion just to have one word with you. Listen, I must... I will speak to you this evening...if not...if not...there is no knowing what I will do. Go to the conservatory. You will see a door on the left; it will let you out into the garden. Follow the path facing you; at the end of it is a little alcove. Wait there for me in ten minutes time. If you fail, I swear I'll make a scene in front of everyone."

He answered coldly: "Very well. I will be there in ten minutes."

They separated. But Jacques Rival buttonholed him with

an interminable anecdote delivered in a very elevated manner; he had clearly been patronizing the buffet. With the greatest difficulty du Roy unloaded him on M de Marelle, who had appeared at last, and fled. He took particular care not to be seen by his wife or Laroche; and was successful for they seemed quite engrossed in one another. He found the garden.

The air was cold and struck him like an ice bath. He muttered: "Christ, I shall get a chill," and wrapped his handkerchief round his neck like a cravat. Then he groped his way along the footpath, dim after the brilliantly illuminated salons.

On his right and left he saw leafless shrubs, their branches rocking dismally in the breeze; greyish lights flickered, gloomy reflections from those in the mansion. Something white appeared in his path and Mme Walter, arms and neck bare, faltered hysterically:

"Ah! You're come at last! Do you want to kill me?"

He answered coolly:

"No melodrama please, or I'll clear off at once."

She threw her arms round him, her lips reaching for his.

"But what have I done? Why are you so cruel to me? What have I done to you?"

He tried to push her away.

"I'll tell you what you have done. Last time, you were with me you twined some of your hair round my buttons and that has estranged my wife from me."

She was taken aback, then shook her head vigorously:

"Oh! Your wife wasn't the one. It must have been one of your mistresses who created a scene."

"I have no mistresses."

"Be quiet! Why do you never come to see me? Why do you refuse to dine with us even once a week? It is abominable the way I suffer. I love you so, that I never have a thought that is not of you, cannot look at anything without seeing you before my eyes, dare not speak a word for fear of uttering your name! You can't begin to understand it, a man like you. I seem to be caught in a vice, smothered in a sack. The ever present remembrance of you dries up my throat, tears and

rends something inside me, my heart, my breast, cramps and fetters my limbs so that I cannot walk, making me sit like an animal all day, on a chair thinking of you."

He stared at her, amazed. This was no longer the fat playful fool he had known but a woman lost, frantic, capable of anything. A vague plan was taking shape in his mind.

He answered quietly:

"My dear, love is not eternal. One takes it and leaves it. But when it goes on and on as it has between us, it may become a horrible burden. I don't want any more of it. That is the plain truth. However, if you can learn to be reasonable and will receive and treat me only as a friend I will call on you often. The thing is are you capable of it?"

She placed her bare arms on his black coat and answered:

"I am capable of anything, just to see you."

"Then it is agreed; we are to be friends and nothing more."

She faltered: "It is agreed," then lifted her lips to kiss him.

"Kiss me just once...the last time."

He gently refused.

"No, we must hold to our agreement."

She turned away, drying her tears, then drew from her corsage a packet of papers tied with pink silk ribbon and offered it to him.

"Take it. It is your share of the profits in the Morocco business. I was so happy to have earned that for you. Please take it."

He made to refuse it: "No, I shan't accept that money."

She flared up again: "Ah! You won't take it from me now! It is yours, it belongs to you. If you refuse it I'll throw it in the gutter. Don't make me do that Georges."

He took the little packet and slipped it in his pocket.

"We must go back. You will take a chill."

She murmured: "So much the better! If I could only die;" she seized his hand and kissed it with passion, rage and despair and fled towards the house.

He walked back, slowly, thoughtfully, and returned to the conservatory smiling.

His wife and Laroche were no longer there. The crowd was lessening and it was evident that only a few were staying to the ball. He saw Suzanne arm in arm with her sister. They both rushed to him and asked him to join in the first quadrille with the Count de Latour-Yvelin. He was surprised.

"Why, who in the world is he?"

Suzanne answered mischievously: "He is a new friend of my sister."

Rose blushed: "It's wrong of you to say that Suzanne. He is no more my friend than yours."

The other smiled: "What a fib!"

Rose was annoyed. She turned her back on them and went off.

Du Roy familiarly took hold of the young girl's elbow near him and in his caressing voice asked: "Listen, my dear child, do you believe me to be your friend?"

"Of course, I do, Bel-Ami."

"Do you trust me?"

"Completely."

"Do you remember what I was telling you a little while ago?"

"What about?"

"About your marriage or rather the man who will marry you."

"Yes."

"Well! Will you promise me just one thing?"

"Yes, but what is it?"

"That you will consult me every time anyone asks for your hand and that you will not accept anyone without taking my advice."

"Yes, I am quite willing."

"And that it will be a secret between the two of us. Not a word to your father or your mother."

"Not a word!"

"Will you swear it?"

"I swear it."

Rival came up importantly.

"Mademoiselle, your father wants you for the ball."

She said: "Come on then Bel-Ami," but he refused, deciding to leave at once and think out various things alone. All kinds of new ideas were running through his mind as he looked about for his wife. He found her drinking chocolate in the buffet with two gentlemen, strangers to him, to whom she presented her husband without naming them to him.

"Shall we go?" he asked her after a little while.

"As soon as you like," she added. "Where is la Patronne? We ought to say good night to her."

"Don't bother. She will only try to keep us for the ball, and I've had enough of it."

"That's true. Let's go."

They were silent all the way home; but, once inside, Madeleine said to him, smiling:

"You don't know what a surprise I've got for you."

He answered peevishly: "Well, what is it?"

"Guess."

"I can't bother to make the effort."

"Well, isn't to-morrow the first of January?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that the time for New Year presents?"

"Well?"

"Here is yours, which Laroche handed me just now."

She handed him a little black box, looking like a jewel case. He opened it indifferently and saw the Cross of the Legion of Honour. He went slightly pale, then smiled and said:

"I would have preferred ten millions. This didn't cost him much."

She had expected him to be overjoyed and was annoyed at his lukewarm manner.

"Upon my word, you are really past belief. Nothing satisfies you now-a-days."

He answered coolly: "The man's only paying his debt; and he owes me a great deal more than that."

His tone surprised her.

"It is a great honour to a man of your age."

"That's a matter of opinion. To-day, I could have more than that."

He took the case and placed it, open, on the mantel-shelf, gazing for some moments at the brilliant star within. Then he shut it up and with a shrug of the shoulders went to bed.

The *Gazette* of the 1st January announced the nomination "of M Prosper-Georges du Roy, publicist, to the rank of Chevalier of the Legion of Honour for exceptional services." His surname was divided into two words, a fact which gave Georges more satisfaction even than the decoration itself.

An hour after reading the public announcement he received a note from la Patronne inviting him to dine the same evening with his wife to celebrate the event. The note was written in ambiguous terms and he threw it into the fire. After some minutes' hesitation he said to Madeleine:

"We are dining this evening at the Walters."

Astonished she remarked: "Really! But I thought you never wanted to set foot in their place again?" to which he only answered: "I've changed my mind."

They found la Patronne alone in the small Louis XVI boudoir adapted for small intimate parties. She was dressed in black and had powdered her hair, making her look quite charming. She gave the impression from a distance of an old woman, and nearer, of a young one. At close quarters even, she made an attractive picture.

"Are you in mourning?" asked Madeleine, to which she replied sadly: "Yes and no. I have not actually lost anyone but I have reached the age when one does mourning for one's life. To-day I wear mourning for the inauguration. Henceforth I shall wear it in my heart."

Du Roy thought: "Let's hope she sticks to it. But will she?"

The dinner was a dreary one. Only Suzanne prattled unceasingly. Rose seemed preoccupied. Everyone congratulated the journalist. The evening wore on, strolling through the grounds and chatting. Du Roy was bringing up the rear with la Patronne when she clasped his arm.

"Listen," she said, lowering her voice... "I will never speak of this again, never...but come to see me...you see that I never 'thee and thou' you now. But it is impossible to live without you...impossible. It is unimaginable torture...I feel

you...you are ever before my eyes, in my heart, in my flesh day and night...It is as if you had made me drink poison which is gnawing and devouring me within. I cannot go on... No, I cannot...I am quite willing to be nothing to you but an old woman...I have made my hair white to show you that, but come here, come sometimes, as a friend only."

She had taken his hand, gripping it convulsively, hurting him, her nails digging into his flesh.

He answered composedly: "That's agreed. There's no use going over it all again. You see for yourself that I came to-day immediately I received your letter."

Walter, who was walking ahead with his two daughters and Madeleine, was waiting for du Roy by "Jesus walking on the waters."

"What d'you think?" he said, laughing, "yesterday, I found my wife on her knees before this picture as if she was in church. She was saying her prayers here. How I laughed!"

Mme Walter replied in a voice surprisingly firm, vibrating with secret exaltation: "It is He, Christ who will save my soul. He gives me courage and renews my strength every time I look at him," and stopping before God upon the sea she murmured: "How beautiful He is! How they fear and love Him, those men! Look at the head, the eyes so human yet so divine!" She stood motionless, facing the Christ, her face as white as her white hair.

CHAPTER VIII

For the rest of the winter, the du Roys were frequent visitors at the Walter mansion, Georges often dining there alone, when Madeleine, pleading a headache, preferred to remain at home.

He had adopted Friday as a fixed date and la Patronne never asked anyone else on that evening. After dinner they played cards, or fed the Chinese fish, Georges living and behaving like one of the family. Occasionally behind clusters of ferns, or in odd corners, Mme Walter would suddenly clasp the young man in her arms, straining him to her breast with all her strength, whispering: "I love you... I love you... it is killing me!" He invariably repulsed her frigidly, answering curtly: "If you begin that all over again I shall stay away."

Towards the end of March rumour was busy with the marriage of both girls. Rose, it was said, was to marry the Count de Latour-Yvelin and Suzanne the Marquis de Cazolles. The two men haunted the house like familiar spirits and were accorded special favours and privileges. Georges and Suzanne lived a life of fraternal carefree intimacy, apparently remarkably pleased with themselves and making fun of everyone else. They never referred again to the girl's possible marriage, nor to the various suitors coming on the scene.

One morning, the director had brought du Roy home to lunch and Mme Walter, after the meal, was called away to attend to a tradesman.

"Come along," said Georges to Suzanne, "let's go and feed the goldfish," and each of them taking some bread, they made for the conservatory.

The whole length of the marble tank was strewn with cushions to enable onlookers to kneel by the goldfish and watch them swimming about. Each taking a cushion, they went on their knees side by side and leaning over the water, began to throw rolled up pellets of bread to the little red monsters who with their round, rolling protruding eyes, fat bodies, comical

open mouths and quick darting movements, had a curious fascination. Georges and Suzanne were laughing at their own distorted reflections in the water.

Suddenly he said, lowering his voice:

"It's not fair to play the fool with me Suzanne."

"What do you mean, Bel-Ami?" the girl demanded.

"Do you remember what you promised me, here, on the evening of the fête?"

"No, what?"

"To consult me every time anyone asked for your hand."

"Well, what about it?"

"Someone has asked for it."

"Who has?"

"You know him quite well."

"No I don't. I swear I don't."

"Yes, you do know him. That long dandified fop, the Marquis de Cazolles."

"I don't think he is a fop at all."

"Very likely. Anyway he is a fool; ruined by gambling and worn out by dissipation. What an ideal match for you, who are so pretty, fresh, unspoilt and intelligent!"

She smiled and asked: "What is it you have against him?"

"I? Nothing at all."

"Yes, you have. He is nothing like as unattractive as you paint him."

"He is a fool and a knave."

She looked up from the water and turned to him. "What in the world is the matter with you?"

He answered, as if a secret was being dragged from the depths of his heart. "The matter is...I am...I am...I am jealous of him."

She was surprised, but not offended. "You?"

"Yes, I."

"But why should you be jealous?"

"Because I am in love with you and you are quite well aware of it, little fraud that you are."

Her tone became severe: "You must be mad, Bel-Ami."

"Yes, I know I am—quite mad. Is it right for me, a mar-

ried man to tell you, a young girl, a thing like that? I am more than mad, I am bad too, behaving like a blackguard. I have no possible hope and the knowledge sends me crazy. And, when I hear rumours of your getting married, I am so infuriated I want to kill someone. You must forgive me Suzanne."

He stopped. The fishes, not receiving any more bread were solemnly motionless, lined up like English soldiers stiffly on parade, staring at the two forms bending over them and no longer bothering about them.

Half wistfully, half chaffingly, the young girl murmured: "It's a pity you are married. But what can be done about it? Not a thing. It's hopeless."

He turned abruptly to her, holding her eyes. "If I were free, would you marry me?"

She answered with frank sincerity: "Yes, I would Bel-Ami, for I like you more than all the rest."

He rose to his feet and blurted out: "Thank you...thank you... I beg of you don't say 'yes' to anyone! Promise me that."

Puzzled and uneasy she answered: "I promise."

Du Roy threw the bread pellet he was holding into the water and fled without another word, as if distraught.

Suzanne, anxious and worried, got up and walked quietly back to the salon. Du Roy had gone.

He went home, perfectly cool and collected. Madeleine was writing letters. He asked her: "Are you dining at the Walters on Friday? I'm going to, myself."

She hesitated: "No, I'm not too well. I shall take a rest and stay home."

He answered: "Just as you like. No one is forcing you."

He took his hat and went out.

For a long time past, he had been spying on her, watching her, following her, tracing all her movements. The hour to strike had come. He was not in the least deceived by her "I shall stay home."

He was particularly pleasant to her in the next few days, and put himself out to be unusually jovial and affectionate. Madeleine remarked on it: "Really you are becoming quite

nice again."

On the Friday he dressed early to pay some calls, as he said, before dining at la Patronne's and set out towards six o'clock, and sought a cab in the Place Notre Dame de Lorette.

Before he left, he kissed his wife.

He found a cab and gave the coachman his orders: "You will stop in front of number 17, rue Fontaine and stay there until I tell you to drive on. Then you will take me at once at the Coq-Faisan restaurant, rue Lafayette." The cab trundled off at a slow trot and du Roy lowered the blinds. Once outside his own door, he kept his eyes glued on it. He had not long to wait. In ten minutes he saw Madeleine go out and set off towards the outer boulevards. He waited till she was out of sight and then put his head out of the window and told the cabbie to drive on. The cab started off again and put him down before the Coq-Faisan, a second rate restaurant well known in the Quartier. Georges went into the main dining room and ordered a meal, eating slowly with his eye on his watch all the time. At half past seven, after finishing his coffee, drinking two glasses of dry champagne and smoking slowly an excellent cigar, he sauntered out, hailed another cab and made for the rue La Rochefoucauld. The cab stopped at the house he had named, and without any inquiry of the concierge, he climbed to the third floor and knocked at the door of a flat. To the maid he said. "M Guibert de Lorme is at home, I believe?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

He was shown into the drawing-room, where he was joined, a few seconds later by a tall gentleman, military looking, decorated and grey haired, though still young.

Du Roy greeted him and said: "As I told you, Monsieur commissioner of police, my wife is dining with her lover in the furnished flat they have taken in the rue des Martyrs."

The magistrate bowed: "I am at your service, Monsieur."

Georges inquired: "We have till nine o'clock, have we not? After that time you cannot enter a private dwelling to obtain proof of adultery."

"The law is, Monsieur, seven o'clock in winter, nine o'clock

after the 31st March. It is now the fifth April so we have up to nine."

"Very well, M Commissioner, I have a carriage waiting, we can take your orderlies and wait a little while outside the door. The later we go, the more chance we have of surprising them in the act."

"Just as you like, Monsieur."

The Commissioner left the room and returned, wearing an overcoat which concealed his tricoloured sash. He stood aside to allow du Roy to precede him; but the journalist, his mind preoccupied, refused to go out first, repeating: "After you... after you."

The magistrate, punctiliously insisted: "You first, Monsieur, I am in my own house." The other bowed and complied.

They went first to police headquarters to pick up three plain clothes constables who were already waiting, Georges having advised the Commissioner during the day, that the surprise would take place that evening. One of the men climbed up beside the coachman; the other two got inside the cab, which made for the rue des Martyrs.

Du Roy said: "I have a plan of the flat. It is on the second floor. We shall find first a small vestibule, then the bedroom. The three rooms are self-contained. There is only one exit, so escape will not be easy. There is a locksmith's shop a few yards away. I have arranged for the locksmith to be available."

It was still only a quarter after eight when they reached the house and they waited in silence more than twenty minutes. As the third quarter sounded Georges said: "Now let's go," and they climbed the staircase without bothering about the porter, who, in any case, had not seen them. One of the policemen remained in the street to watch the exit. At the second floor the four men halted and Georges applied his ear to the door, and then his eye to the keyhole. He heard and saw nothing. He sounded the bell.

The Commissioner said to his orderlies: "You wait here and come in, if I call you."

They waited. After a few minutes Georges rang the bell

several times in succession. They heard a sound from the end of the room; then a light step drew near. Someone inside was trying to spy out the land. The journalist rapped sharply on the woodwork with his knuckles.

A voice, that of a woman trying to disguise itself demanded: "Who is there?"

The municipal officer answered: "Open in the name of the law."

The voice repeated: "Who are you?"

"I am the Commissioner of Police. Open, or I shall force an entrance."

The voice went on: "What is it you want?"

Du Roy exclaimed: "It's I. It's useless trying to escape us."

The light footfalls, those of bare feet, died away, then after a few seconds returned.

Georges went on: "If you won't open the door, we are going to break it in." He gripped the brass door handle and threw his weight against the door with his shoulder. There was no result at first, but, putting forth all his strength in one violent push, he succeeded in making the old decayed woodwork give way. There was a parting of locks and screws and he was thrown right against Madeleine standing in the ante-chamber, clad only in a chemise and petticoat, her limbs bare, a lighted candle in her hand.

He shouted: "That's the woman. We've got them," and dashed into the room; the Commissioner, removing his hat punctiliously, followed, and his wife quite staggered came behind them, lighting the way.

They passed through a dining room on the table of which were the scattered remains of a meal: empty champagne bottles, an open tin of foies gras, a fowl and some half eaten pieces of bread. On two plates, upon the dresser, were heaped up oyster shells.

The room looked as if it had been the scene of a fight. A woman's dress was flung across a chair and a man's trousers thrown casually across a couch. Four shoes, two large and two small, lay on their sides at the foot of the bed. It was a third rate furnished flat shabbily upholstered, full of that

repulsive rancid odour peculiar to that class of dwelling, pervading the curtains, bedding, walls and chairs, the odour of people who had slept or lived in it for a day, a week or six months and had left behind them something of themselves, the scent of human beings which added to that of their predecessors had formed in course of time that vague repulsive unbearable stench typical of such places. A plate of cakes, a bottle of chartreuse and two wine glasses, still half full, were on the mantel-shelf. The bronze clock was hidden beneath a man's tall hat.

The Commissioner turned to Madeleine and eyed her keenly. "You are Mme Claire Madeleine du Roy, lawful wife of M Prosper-Georges du Roy, publicist, here present?"

She made no reply.

The Magistrate went on: "What are you doing here? I find you, away from your home, practically naked in a furnished flat. For what purpose have you come here?" He waited a few moments for a reply, then as she was still silent, warned her: "If you refuse to make a statement Madame, I shall be compelled to record the fact."

On the bed, concealed by a blanket, lay a motionless form. The Commissioner walked across: "Monsieur?"

The man lying on the bed did not move. He appeared to have his back turned to them and his head was buried in the pillows.

The officer touched what was apparently his shoulder:

"Monsieur, I advise you not to use force."

But the concealed body remained as motionless as the dead.

Du Roy stepped forward and with a sharp jerk, ripped away the covering and snatched off the pillows disclosing the livid face of M Laroche-Mathieu. He leaned over him, trembling with the desire to cut his throat or throttle him and snarled between closed teeth: "At least, have the courage of your infamy."

The Magistrate demanded: "Who are you?" and the discomfited lover not replying, added: "I am the Commissioner of Police and I order you to tell me your name."

Georges, who was shaking with animal rage, shouted: "An-

swer, you cur, or I'll name you myself."

The man on the bed mumbled something at last: "Monsieur the Commissioner you have no right to allow me to be insulted by this individual. Am I in your charge or his? Must I answer him or you?"

He seemed to have no saliva in his mouth.

The officer replied: "Answer me Monsieur and me alone. I demand that you state who you are."

The other was silent. He clutched the blanket tightly up to his neck and rolled his panicstricken eyes. His tiny re-troussé moustache looked jet black against his dead white skin.

The Commissioner resumed: "If you decline to reply I shall be forced to arrest you. In any case get up. I will interrogate you when you are dressed."

The body twisted about in the bed and the head muttered: "But I can't get up."

"Why not?" demanded the Magistrate.

The other bleated: "Because...because I am quite naked."

Du Roy laughed loudly and picking up a chemise which was lying on the ground, threw it on the bed.

"Come along...get up...since you don't mind taking your clothes off before my wife, you can put them on again before me."

He turned his back and walked to the chimney.

Madeleine had recovered her usual poise and realizing that all was lost, was ready to dare anything. Her eyes were bright with reckless audacity and bravado. Rolling a piece of paper she coolly lighted, as if for a reception, all the ten candles in the tawdry candelabra on the mantelpiece and then leaned casually against it and stretching one of her bare feet to the dying fire and, nonchalantly hitching up her petticoat which had slipped down over her thighs, she took a cigarette from a little pink box, lighted it and composedly began to smoke.

The Commissioner had turned to her while her paramour was dressing. She twitted him insolently: "Do you often play this part Monsieur?"

He answered gravely: "As seldom as possible Madame."

She smiled at him sardonically: "I am glad to hear it. It

is hardly proper, you know."

She took not the least notice of her husband and affected not to see him.

The gentleman of the bed was now dressed. He had put on his trousers, donned his waistcoat and now walked across, fastening the buttons.

The police chief turned to him, "Now, Monsieur, be good enough to tell me who you are."

The other said not a word.

"Very well. You force me to arrest you."

At that, the man exclaimed sharply: "You can't lay a finger on me. I am immune from arrest on civil process."

Du Roy leaped at him as if he was going to knock him down.

"It is the flagrant act," he shouted, "the flagrant act of adultery. I can have you arrested, if I like...and I do like," then added: "This man calls himself Laroche-Mathieu, Minister of Foreign Affairs."

The Commissioner drew back, astounded. "Is that true Monsieur? Are you or are you not going to say who you are?"

The man pulled himself together. "For once," he said forcibly, "that miserable cad there has not lied. I am Laroche-Mathieu, the Minister." Then pointing to Georges' breast, on which a small red patch stood out like a flame, he sneered: "And even now the blackguard is wearing on his coat the cross of honour that I gave him."

Du Roy became livid. With a lightning gesture he snatched the bright red ribbon from his buttonhole and flung it into the fireplace: "There you are, that's what a decoration is worth which comes from a swine like you."

They were facing one another with clenched fists, both infuriated, at breaking point.

The Commissioner stepped between them quickly and forcibly held them apart. "Come gentlemen," he said peremptorily, "this is legal process, behave yourselves."

They quietened down and turned their backs to each other. Madeleine, motionless and smiling amusedly, calmly went on smoking.

The official proceeded to a formal charge: "Monsieur the Minister, I have surprised you, alone with Mme du Roy here present, you in a bed, she nearly naked, your clothing thrown pellmell across the room. That constitutes the flagrant act of adultery. You cannot deny the evidence. Have you anything to say?"

Laroche-Mathieu muttered: "I have nothing to say. Do your duty."

The Commissioner addressed Madeleine: "Do you admit, Madame, that this gentleman is your lover?"

She answered fearlessly: "I don't deny it. He is my lover."

"That is sufficient."

The Magistrate was proceeding to make some formal notes on the state and disposition of the flat and was just finishing when the minister who was now fully dressed and stood waiting with his overcoat over his arm and his hat in his hand asked: "Have you any further need of my presence, Monsieur? What do I do now? May I go?"

Du Roy answered him, smiling insolently: "Why go? We have finished. You can go to bed again, Monsieur; we are going to leave you alone together."

He touched the Commissioner's arm.

"Let us retire, Monsieur Commissioner, we have nothing further to do in this place."

Rather surprised, the Magistrate was following him out; on the threshold Georges halted to give him precedence. The other courteously refused. Du Roy insisted: "Pass, Monsieur," to which the Commissioner replied: "After you."

The journalist saluted him and said with ironical formality:

"It is your turn now, Monsieur Commissioner. I am practically in my own home here."

Then he quietly closed the door with an air of exaggerated discretion. An hour later Georges du Roy walked into the editorial sanctum of *la Vie Française*.

M Walter was already there for he still directed and controlled the paper which had enormously increased its circulation and was a powerful support for the grandiose operations

of his bank. He looked up: "So there you are. You're looking rather queer. Why didn't you come to dinner at the house? Where have you been?"

The young man, sure of his effect, announced, emphasizing every syllable: "I have been throwing out the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

Walter thought he was joking. "What do you mean... throwing out?"

"I have altered the Cabinet. That's all. It was about time to get rid of that carrion."

The old man was bewildered and thought that his political editor was drunk. "Now, now, talk sense."

"That's exactly what I am doing. I have just surprised M Laroche-Mathieu in the flagrant act of adultery with my wife. The Commissioner of Police has formally charged him with the offence. The Minister is down the drain."

The amazed director, mechanically took off his spectacles: "You are not making a fool of me?"

"Certainly not. I'm about to make a news item of the fact."

"But, what do you intend to do about it?"

"To smash that cheat and liar and public swindler."

Georges threw his hat on a chair and went on: "Let those look to themselves who get in my way. I never forgive."

The director was still at sea. "But...what about your wife?"

"My divorce petition will be filed to-morrow morning. I am returning her to the late lamented Forestier."

"Do you really want to divorce her?"

"Most certainly. She has made me ridiculous. But I had to play the part of a fool to catch them out. Well, I've done it; and, now I am master of the situation."

The director had not yet collected all his wits. He looked at du Roy with wary eyes, thinking: "I must watch him; he's a fellow to be careful of."

Georges went on: "I'm now a free man...I have a certain fortune...I shall stand at the General Election in October for my own province where I am well-known. I could not be a

candidate, or expect any support with that woman who was suspect on all sides. She took me in, fool that I was, cajoled, got round me and hooked me. But since I found out what her game was I watched her, the bitch."

He began to laugh: "It was that poor Forestier who was the cuckold...trusting, tranquil, betrayed without a suspicion of it. Well, I've rid myself of the scab that he bequeathed to me. Now I shall go far." He sat down, legs astraddle across a chair and repeated thoughtfully: "Yes, I shall go far."

And Daddy Walter, peering curiously at him, his spectacles pushed up to his forehead, muttered to himself: "Yes, he will go far, the blackguard."

Georges rose. "Well, I'm off to make a column or two of it. It will have to be done discreetly. But you know the Minister is done for. He is a man in the sea; and no one can fish him out again. *La Vie Française* has no further use for his services."

The old man hesitated a little, then decided to take his side.

"Agreed," said he. "And so much the worse for those who mix up pleasure with business."

CHAPTER IX

THREE months had passed. Du Roy's divorce had been granted. His wife had resumed the name of Forestier. The Walters were leaving for Trouville on 15th July and had arranged for a day in the country before their departure. They chose a Thursday for the outing, and, at nine o'clock, on a fine morning set out in a gorgeous coach and four with seats for six persons.

Lunch was to be at Saint-Germain in the Henri IV pavilion. Bel-Ami, unable to endure the presence of the Marquis de Cazolles had stipulated that he should be the only man in the party, but at the last moment it was decided that the Count de Latour-Yvelin should be included, and he was invited on the evening before.

The coach set off at a smart trot down the avenue des Champs-Élysées, then across the bois de Boulogne.

It was ideal summer weather, not too hot. Across the blue sky, the swallows traced long gracefully curving lines that one imagined one saw after they had passed.

The three ladies sat at the back of the coach, with the three men facing them, Walter between his two guests.

They crossed the Seine, went round Mount Valérien to Bougival, then followed the river to Pecq. The Count de Latour-Yvelin, a rather worn out looking gentleman with a long fair beard which the slightest breeze ruffled gazed tenderly at Rose; they had been engaged one month. Georges' eyes continually sought Suzanne's; they were both very pale. Their eyes met in quick fugitive understanding glances, seeming to exchange secret thoughts. Mme Walter was serenely happy. It was a long boring lunch and after it, Georges suggested a walk on the terrace.

Georges and Suzanne brought up the rear; as soon as the others were out of hearing he said in low tense tones: "Suzanne I adore you. I am mad about you."

She whispered: "I too, Bel-Ami."

"If I can't have you for my wife, I will leave Paris and this country."

"Then ask papa's consent," she answered; "he might give it."

He shook his head impatiently: "No, I tell you, for the tenth time, that would be useless. He will shut his door in my face; he will dismiss me from the paper; and we shall not be able even to see one another. That's the precise answer I should get to a formal proposal. They have promised you to the Marquis de Cazolles, hoping that in the end you will give in and say 'yes.' That's what they're waiting for and what they anticipate."

"What can we do then?"

He hesitated, looking away from her.

"Do you love me enough to do something reckless?"

"Yes."

"Very reckless?"

"Yes."

"The most reckless thing possible?"

"Yes."

"Would you have the pluck to defy your father and your mother?"

"Yes."

"Honestly?"

"Yes."

"Well! There is one way and one way only. It is something that must come from you, not from me. You are a spoilt child, allowed to say anything, and they will not be surprised at anything you do, however daring and audacious. Listen carefully. When you get back this evening you must seek out your mother first, and get her quite alone. And you must tell her, straight out, that you want to marry me. She will be tremendously upset and terribly angry..."

Suzanne interrupted: "Oh no! Mamma will be in favour of it."

He said sharply: "Nothing of the kind. You don't know her. She will be far more astonished and furious than your father. You will see how she will refuse. But you keep firm,

don't yield an inch; stick to it that you will marry me, only me, and no one else but me. Will you do it?"

"I will do it."

"Then, leave your mother and go to your father and tell him the same thing. Be very serious and absolutely determined."

"Yes, yes. And then?"

"And then—this is where the matter becomes really grave. If you have made up your mind and are resolute, quite resolute, quite, quite, quite, determined to be my wife, my dear, dear little Suzanne...I will...I will take you away."

She was in raptures and clapped her hands delightedly: "Oh! What happiness! How heavenly! You will take me away! When will you?"

All the age-old poesy of nocturnal elopements, post-chaises, wayside hostelries, all the exciting romantic adventures of song and story passed through the young girl's mind in a flash like a fairy tale come true. She repeated: "When will you take me away?"

Very softly he told her: "This evening...to-night."

She began to tremble a little: "And where shall we run away to?"

"Ah! That is my secret. Reflect carefully on what you are doing. Remember that, after this flight you will have to be my wife! It is the only way but it is...it is very dangerous...for you."

She declared: "I have decided...where shall I meet you?"

"Will you be able to leave the house unnoticed?"

"Yes, I will go out by the little side door."

"Good! When the concierge has gone to bed, towards midnight join me in the Place de la Concorde. You will find me in a cab, drawn up outside the Ministry of Marine."

"I will be there."

"Truly?"

"Word of honour!"

He took her hand and pressed it: "How I love you! How good and brave you are! So you don't want to marry M de Cazolles?"

"No, of course I don't."

"Your father was very annoyed when you said no?"

"Very much indeed, he wanted to send me back to the convent."

"You understand you will have to be determined?"

"I will be."

She gazed at the vast horizon, enraptured at this idea of an elopement. She would be going beyond it...with him...she would be carried off...she was proud of it...Not a thought occurred to her of her reputation, of any possible disgrace. Did she even know of such things or have the least inkling of them?

They went back.

"Ah! There you are my pet," said Mme Walter. "What have you been doing with Bel-Ami?"

They rejoined the others and the conversation turned to the sea baths they would soon be enjoying.

On the way back, through the Chatou Road, Georges was very silent and thoughtful. If this child had a little courage, he was going to succeed after all! For the past three months he had been weaving the spell of his irresistible charm around her. He had fascinated her, captivated her, conquered her. He had made her love him, he who knew so well how to make himself loved. Without the least difficulty he had plucked the fanciful heart of a doll. It was his doing that she had refused M de Cazolles. It was his doing, that she was now about to elope with him. It was the only way.

Mme Walter, he well knew, would never consent under any conditions whatever to give him her daughter. She loved him still and always would love him, with intractable violence. He kept her within bounds by calculated coldness but he realized that all the time she was consumed by impotent, starving passion. It was hopeless to think of persuading her. Never would she agree to his taking Suzanne. But once he had the child with him at a distance he could negotiate with the father and that with an all powerful weapon in his hand. With all this on his mind he answered absentmindedly anything that was said to him and was abstracted and thoughtful until they reached Paris again. Suzanne too was preoccupied and

the regular sound of the four horses trotting raised vision of broad endless highways, of moonlight eternally bright, of roadside inns, of eager postboys rushing to change horses, of lovers fleeing and pursued.

At last the coach pulled up in the courtyard and Georges was pressed to stay to dinner. He refused and went home.

After a scanty meal he put his papers in order as if preparing for a long absence, destroying compromising letters, hiding others, and writing to a few friends.

Occasionally he glanced at the clock, thinking: "She's getting ready now." He became nervous and uneasy. What if the plan miscarried? Well, if it did he had little to fear. He would wriggle out of it somehow. He was playing for a very high stake that evening, one well worth a risk! At eleven he left the house, wandered about for a time and then taking a cab to the Place de la Concorde, waited, inside it, outside the Ministry of Marine. As midnight approached he grew feverishly impatient, lighting match after match to see the time, every other minute peering out of the window to scan the street.

A distant clock struck twelve, then another nearer, two together and finally last one, far away; as the sounds died down, he muttered: "It's all over. It's misfired. She isn't coming."

None the less he intended to wait till daybreak; the occasion called for patience.

He heard the first quarter sound, the half hour, three quarters. Then, one after the other, all the clocks sounded one o'clock as they had proclaimed midnight. He could only wait, trying, with growing uneasiness, to guess what had gone wrong.

Suddenly a woman's face appeared at the window.

"Are you there Bel-Ami?"

For one suffocating moment his heart stopped beating.

"Is it you Suzanne?"

"Yes. It is I."

He was so excited he could hardly turn the door handle.

"Ah! It is you...it is you...come."

She entered and collapsed in a heap at his side. A sharp word to the coachman and the cab started off.

Eagerly he demanded: "Tell me Suzanne, what happened?"

The girl was gasping for breath and could not speak. At last she said faintly: "Oh! It has been ghastly...especially with mamma."

He was scared and greatly perturbed. "Your mother? What did she say? Tell me."

"Oh! She has been frightful. I went to her room and recited my little piece which I had prepared, word for word. She went as white as a sheet and cried: 'Never! Never!' Then I wept, I stormed, I swore I could never marry anyone but you. I really thought she was going to beat me. She seemed to go quite mad; she screamed that she would send me back to the convent to-morrow. I have never seen her like it, never. I could not believe my eyes. Papa must have heard her abuse and insults, and he came in. He was nothing like so frantic as she was but he, too, refused. He said you were not a good enough match. They went on and on and finally I became hysterical too and screamed louder than both of them. Then papa ordered me off to bed with a melodramatic air which didn't suit him at all. That settled it. I decided to come to you, and here I am. Where do we go now?"

He had gently loosened her dress, listening intently with beating heart, sharp hatred growing against both of them. But he had their daughter. Very soon they should see.

He answered: "It is too late to catch the train. This carriage will take us as far as Sèvres where we will spend the night. To-morrow we will make for La Roche-Guyon. It's a pretty little village on the banks of the Seine between Mantes and Bonnières."

"I have brought nothing with me. Not a thing."

He smiled carelessly: "That's all right. We'll arrange all that."

The cab rolled on through the streets. Georges took the young girl's hand, kissing it, slowly and with careful respect. Himself hardly accustomed to strictly platonic affairs he didn't know how to talk to her. Suddenly he saw the child was

weeping. He asked her anxiously: "What is the matter, little one?"

She answered tearfully: "I'm thinking of my poor mamma. She won't be able to sleep, if she found out I've ran away."

Her mother was indeed unable to sleep.

As soon as Suzanne had left the room, she had turned to her husband, completely distracted.

"My God! What are we to make of it all?"

Walter shouted furiously: "We are to make of it that this trickster has got round her; that it was he who persuaded her to refuse Cazolles. He finds her dowry a fat one, damn him!"

He stamped angrily up and down the room: "You led him on all the time. You, with your flattery, your making up to him, your ceaseless chatter about him. It was Bel-Ami this Bel-Ami that, from morning till night. Now we've got to pay for it."

White faced, she murmured: "I?...I led him on?"

"Yes," he bellowed. "You! You were all mad on him. you, la Marelle, Suzanne and the others. Do you think that I didn't see that you couldn't let even a couple of days pass without making him come here?"

She drew herself up scornfully: "I will not allow you to speak to me like that. You forget that I was not dragged up as you were, in a shop."

He stopped short and looked at her incredulously, then with a furious "Nom de Dieu!" flung out of the room slamming the door after him.

Left alone, she went, instinctively to the mirror to look at herself to see if anything had changed in her through these strange, impossible, monstrous happenings. Suzanne in love with Bel-Ami. And Bel-Ami wanting to marry Suzanne! No! Not the latter. She refused to believe it. It could not be true. The child had quite naturally become infatuated with an attractive young man and hoped she would be allowed to marry him; she had thrown her little bombshell and that was that. But he? He could not have been a party to it! She thought it out from all sides, as one does in the face of over-

whelming disaster. No, Bel-Ami could not have known of Suzanne's escapade.

For a long while she pondered over his possible treachery or innocence. What a wretch he was, if it was he who had actually prepared the blow! And what would come of it? What dangers and agonies lay ahead!

If he was in ignorance of the whole thing, then everything could be settled. They would take Suzanne away for a six months' sea voyage and that would be the end of it. But what about herself? How could she possibly see him again after all this? For she would always love him. Passion had entered her like one of those barbed arrows that can never be drawn out. Life without him was impossible. Better to die.

Her thoughts bewildered her in their anguish and uncertainty. The effort of concentration made her head swim; her ideas were becoming confused, physically painful, wandering. The searching, probing, the lack of knowing anything, the uncertainty began to unnerve her.

She looked at her watch; it was past one o'clock. She muttered: "I can't stay here doing nothing. I shall go mad. I must wake Suzanne and question her."

She went candle in hand and barefooted not to make a noise, to her daughter's room; opened the door quietly and looked at the bed. It was neatly made. She could not take it in at first and told herself that the girl was talking things over with her father; but a terrible suspicion held her in its grip and she sped to her husband's room. She was there in a flash, white and trembling.

Walter was in bed, reading. He looked up, startled.

"Well? What is it? What's the trouble now?"

"Have you seen Suzanne?"

"I? No, of course not. Why?"

"She's...she's gone...she is not in her room."

With one bound he leapt out of bed, shuffled into his slippers and his night shirt ludicrously flapping in the breeze, was off down the corridor in his turn to his daughter's room.

One glance inside and there was no room for doubt. The child had fled.

He fell into a chair, his lighted lamp on the ground by his side.

His wife came in after him. "Well?"

He hardly had the strength to answer her. He was no longer even angry.

He groaned: "It is all over. He has her. We are lost."

She didn't understand: "What do you mean, lost?"

"Parbleu, isn't it obvious? He will have to marry her now."

She uttered a queer sharp animal-like scream. "He! Never! You must be crazy!"

He answered sorrowfully: "It's no use screaming. He has taken her away, he has dishonoured her. The best thing now is to give her to him. If we are careful no one need ever know of this."

She was shaking with terrible emotion. "Never! Never! Never will I give my consent. He shall never have Suzanne!"

Walter answered dejectedly: "But he has her. It is done. And now he will keep her and hide her till we give in. So there is only one thing to do. Give in now and save a public scandal."

Torn by grief she dared not own, she repeated: "No! No! I will never agree."

Impatiently he took her up: "Can't you see, there is nothing to discuss? It is unavoidable now. We have no choice. Ah! The swine, how he has fooled us...but, all the same he's clever there's no denying that. We could have found many a better match for her certainly, as regards position but not as regards wits and a future. He is a coming man. He will be deputy and minister."

His wife reiterated with fanatical resolve: "Never...I will not allow that man to marry Suzanne. You hear what I say... Never!"

Her implacable resistance exasperated him and as a man of common sense he ended by taking up the cudgels on Bel-Ami's behalf.

"For heaven's sake be sensible...I repeat marriage is now necessary...absolutely imperative. Besides, who knows? We may not regret it, after all. With a man of his calibre, one

never knows what he will attain to. You saw yourself how, in three articles he toppled over that clown Laroche-Mathieu and how cleverly and with what dignity he behaved in a very difficult situation for a husband. Anyhow we shall see. The plain fact is we are caught and we can't get ourselves out of it."

She wanted to scream, roll on the ground, tear her hair; she repeated incessantly: "He shall not have her. I will not allow it."

Walter rose and took up his lamp. "You're a fool, like the rest of your sex. Can't you see these hysterics get you nowhere? You don't know how to accept the inevitable... you're just being stupid! I tell you he has got to marry her. There is no way out of it."

He left her, pulling on his drawers as he went, and like a comic ghost vanished in the long corridor of the vast sleeping mansion making quietly for his bedroom.

His wife remained motionless racked by unbearable grief. Even now she could not take it in. She only knew she was in agony. She felt she could not stay there, alone, till day-break. She must save her reason somehow, run away, go out, seek help, be comforted. She tried to think whom to send for, some man. There was none. A priest? Yes, that was it, a priest. She would throw herself at his feet and admit everything, confess her sin and her despair. He would understand that the wicked wretch must not marry Suzanne and would prevent it.

She must go at once. But where could she find a priest at that hour? Where could she go? To stay still was impossible.

Suddenly, the serene vision of Jesus walking on the sea, passed before her eyes. He seemed to be calling her, to be saying:

"Come unto me and I will give you rest."

Taking her candle she made for the conservatory. The painting was in a little alcove enclosed by a glass door to protect it from the effects of the damp ground, a kind of chapel in a miniature forest of strange foliage.

Entering the winter garden, which previously she had only seen illuminated, Mme Walter was startled by its gloomy

darkness. The atmosphere was heavy with the sickening scent of exotic Eastern plants; and, all the doors being closed, the perfumed air shut in under the glass roof, entered the lungs with a deadening drugged lassitude which was half pleasure and half pain, imparting to the flesh a strange sensation of enervating voluptuousness and death.

The poor woman stumbled along, frightened by the shadows of weird plants which seemed, in the flickering light of the candle, like trembling monsters and ghosts of strange misshapen beings.

Suddenly she saw the Christ and opening the dividing door, she fell on her knees.

At first she prayed with the perfervid abandonment of a lost soul, babbling frantic desperate invocations, then, becoming a little calmer she raised her eyes full of anguish.

She faltered: "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" but it was the name "Georges" which came to her lips.

The thought struck her like a blow, that at this very moment, Georges, perhaps was possessing her daughter. He was alone with her, somewhere in a room. He! He! with Suzanne.

She repeated: "Jesus!...Jesus!" but she was thinking of them...of her daughter and her lover! She saw them so plainly that they might have been there before her, in the place of the picture. They were in a room...It was night. They were smiling...in each other's arms. The room was dark...the bedclothes thrown back. She strove to go to them...to grip her daughter by the hair and tear her from his embrace. She tried to seize her by the throat to strangle her, this daughter whom she hated, who was giving herself to this man.

She uttered a piercing scream and fell to the ground.

The next day they found her lying unconscious, almost asphyxiated before "Jesus walking on the water." She was so ill, that she nearly died. It was not for some days that her reason returned. Then came the relief of tears.

Suzanne's disappearance was accounted for to the servants by the explanation that she had suddenly been sent back to the convent. And M Walter replied to a long letter from

du Roy by according him his daughter's hand.

Bel-Ami had posted this epistle the moment they left Paris, having written it out in readiness the same evening. In it he said in conciliatory terms, that he had long loved the girl, that there had been no understanding between them but as she had come to him of her own accord and said: "I will be your wife," he had considered himself justified in keeping her with him and even in concealing her until he had obtained a reply from her parents whose legal consent he valued less than the willingness of his fiancée herself.

He asked M Walter to reply to the *poste restante*, telling him a friend had undertaken to deliver the letter to him.

When he had secured what he wanted he brought Suzanne back to Paris and sent her back to her parents, taking care to keep away himself, for the time.

They had spent six days by the side of the Seine.

Never had the girl enjoyed herself so much. She had played at being a country maid. He had passed her off as his sister and they lived in a free and easy chaste intimacy, a kind of affectionate comradeship. He thought it prudent to respect her. On the morrow of their arrival she had bought and decked herself out in rustic clothes including an enormous straw hat trimmed with wild flowers. She loved the country and they spent their time fishing, inspecting the ancient castle and its wonderful tapestries, with picnics in the meadows by the banks of the river or on the river itself, Georges in quaint ready-made country attire. There were frequent hurried tremulous embraces on her part completely innocent, on his, full of temptation. But he knew how to restrain himself; and when he told her: "We must go back to Paris to-morrow, your father has given me your hand;" the child answered artlessly: "Already? it has been quite nice, being your wife!"

CHAPTER X

It was dark in the little flat in the rue de Constantinople. Georges du Roy and Clotilde de Marelle had met outside the door and she had gone quickly inside and without giving him time even to raise the venetians had attacked him. "So you are engaged to Suzanne Walter?"

He coolly admitted the fact. "Didn't you know?"

She was furiously indignant. "You, engaged to Suzanne Walter! That's too much! Altogether too much! For three months you have fooled me and kept it to yourself. The whole world knew it except myself! And now my husband tells me of it!"

Du Roy started laughing, a little uneasily, and putting his hand on the mantel-shelf sat down.

She stared at him with gathering rage: "You have been preparing this blow ever since you left your wife, and you have been keeping me on as your mistress, just to pass the interval. What an unspeakable cad you are!"

He asked blandly: "Why? I had a wife who was deceiving me. I found her out; I have taken a divorce and I marry another woman. What could be more natural?"

She began to tremble: "Oh! How cunning you are and dangerous!"

He smiled: "Idiots and fools are made to be duped!"

"How could I have failed to see through you from the beginning! But, no I could not guess you would be such a villain as that! Not even you!"

His pose became dignified. "I must ask you to be careful, what you say."

His assumed indignation disgusted her.

"What! So I am to be careful what I say now! You behave to me like a scoundrel and I am to say nothing! You can swindle everyone, exploit everyone, take your pleasure and your money right and left, and you expect me to treat you as if you were an honest man!"

He rose, his lip trembling. "Be quiet or I must ask you to leave."

"To leave...to leave...you must ask me to leave...you...you!" She was nearly suffocating with rage and could hardly speak. After a little, as if the gates of her wrath had crashed open, she screamed: "To leave...you forget that I am the one who has paid for this flat from the very first day...Ah! Yes, you have bragged about taking it over yourself from time to time.... But whose flat is it?... It is mine..who has paid the rent to keep it on... I have....And so I am to clear out.... Be quiet you wretch!.... Do you think I don't know how you stole from Madeleine half the Vaudrec legacy? Do you think I don't know that you went to bed with Suzanne to force her to marry you?..."

He gripped her shoulders and shook her: "Don't you dare to say that. I warn you."

"You slept with her; I know you did."

He had put up with the rest of her abuse but this lie infuriated him. The hometruths that she had shrieked in his face had merely irritated him, but the falsehood about the child who was to become his wife made him long to strike her.

He warned her again: "Shut up...take care...shut up!" He was shaking like a branch being shaken for its fruit.

With hair awry, mouth wide open, eyes frenzied, she screamed again, "You slept with her!"

He loosened his grip on her and knocked her down. Even then, crouched against the wall and lifting herself on her hands she repeated again and again, "You slept with her!"

He rushed at her, pulled her to her feet and holding her off with one hand, struck her with the other as if she had been a man.

She was silent now, moaning under his blows. She was no longer standing but sank to the ground, trying to shield her body in the angle of the wall and the floor, weeping pitifully.

The rain of blows ceased and he drew away, walking sharply up and down the room, trying to pull himself together. Going into the bedroom he took a jug of cold water and bathed his head, then returned carefully drying his hands, to see

what she was doing.

She had not moved and was still stretched on the ground sobbing quietly.

He demanded: "Will you have finished your blubbering soon?"

She made no reply; and he stood in the middle of the room, a little embarrassed and ashamed, her body prostrate before him.

Suddenly he came to a decision and took his hat from the mantel-shelf. "Good evening. You can give the key to the concierge, when you are ready. I'm not going to wait your convenience."

He left and, shutting the door, sought the caretaker in his lodge. "Madame is resting. She will be leaving presently. Inform the landlord that I am giving notice to quit on the 1st October. It is now the 16th August, so that is ample notice."

He went off briskly, recollecting that the summer sales afforded an excellent opportunity for some bargain purchases for the approaching wedding.

It was fixed for the 20th October, immediately after the re-opening of the Assembly; and was to take place at the Madeleine Church. There had been much speculation about the marriage without anyone knowing the actual facts. Various stories were current; there had been talk of an elopement but nothing definite had leaked out.

The rumour amongst the domestics was that Mme Walter, who now completely ignored her future son-in-law, had been bitterly opposed to the match and, on the evening on which it had been decided, had spirited her daughter away to the convent at midnight.

She had almost died; and, certainly would never be her former self again. She looked an old woman now; her hair had become quite grey; she had fallen back on her religion and attended mass regularly.

Early in September, the *Vie Française* announced that the Baron du Roy de Cantel had become its editor-in-chief, M Walter retaining the title of Managing Director.

It had enlisted the services of an army of columnists, littérateurs, political experts and art and dramatic critics all of the first rank and all suborned by the lure of money from the great old established dailies.

Veteran journalists, owners of famous and revered names no longer shrugged contemptuous shoulders at the mention of the *Vie Française*; its swift and overwhelming success had silenced the voices of hostile critics.

The marriage of its editor-in-chief was one of the events of the Parisian season, for Georges du Roy and the Walters had for some time past been the objects of lively curiosity. Everyone whom they had flattered in the paper's society columns had promised to attend.

The event took place on a clear autumn day.

From eight o'clock in the morning a large red carpet, laid over the stone steps leading to the great west door of the church, proclaimed to the people of Paris that a great ceremony was to take place.

Clerks in their way to office, little milliners and shop assistants stopped and looked, vaguely wondering why rich people spent so much money, just to become coupled.

Towards ten o'clock the curious began to loiter round, staying for a few minutes in the hope that, perhaps, the show was about to begin, and then going their ways.

At eleven, a squad of police sergeants appeared and began to move on the rapidly growing crowd, increasing every minute. Then came the first arrivals amongst the guests, determined to get good seats. They appropriated the end chairs in the middle aisle of the great nave. Little by little came others, women with rustle of silks and satins, solemn faced men, nearly all bald, walking with that unctuous smug gravity which they considered appropriate to the place.

The church slowly filled. A ray of sunlight through the great open doors shone on the nearest rows of seated guests. In the choir which seemed rather sombre, the yellow glow of the altar candles flickered, humble and pallid before this brilliant track of the sun. There were greetings, beckonings, formings into groups. The literary men, with less reverence

than their society prototypes, chatted in undertones and looked at the women.

Norbert de Varenne, seeking a friend to talk to, saw Jacques Rival, towards the middle of a row of chairs, and joined him.

"Well! Well!" said he. "The future is to the sly!" The other man, whose disposition was not an envious one, answered genially. "And good luck to him! His future is made."

Rival asked: "Have you any idea, what has become of his wife?"

The poet smiled: "Yes and no. They tell me she is living very quietly in the Montmartre district. But...there is always a 'but'...a little while ago, I read in the *Plume* a series of very able political articles which bore an uncanny resemblance to those of Forestier and du Roy. They were under the name of Jean le Dol, a rather intelligent young bachelor of the same race as our friend Georges, who has made the acquaintance of his former wife. From which I conclude that she has a fancy for novices and always will have. Anyway, she is very wealthy, you know. She didn't receive the attentions of Vandree and Laroche-Mathieu for nothing."

Rival answered: "She is not at all a bad sort, that little Madeleine. Very astute and very clever. She must look charming undressed! But, tell me how has du Roy managed to get married in church after getting a divorce?"

"He is being married in church, because, in the eyes of the Church, the first marriage was no marriage at all."

"What does that mean?"

"Our Bel-Ami, either through indifference or to save expense, considered the registry office sufficient when he married Madeleine Forestier. He dispensed with any ecclesiastical sanction and, therefore to our Holy Mother the Church, was simply living in sin. Consequently he appears before her to-day as a bachelor and she is ready to bless him with all her pomp and circumstance, at the expense and cost of Daddy Walter."

The noise of the crowd was growing, voices were raised almost to conversation pitch. Celebrities posed and postured, pushing themselves well in the limelight, carefully displaying

their practised poise before the public, skilled in exhibitionism at all social functions at which they were, in their own opinion, the indispensable ornaments, the showpieces, the mainstays.

"Another thing," asked Rival, "you often call on the director, is it true that Mme Walter and du Roy are not on speaking terms?"

"Quite true. She didn't want to give the child to him. He had some hold over the father and threatened to disinter some dry bones, possibly those of the corpses killed in Morocco. Walter remembered the example of Laroche-Mathieu and threw up the sponge at once. But the mother, obstinate like all women, swore that she would never again speak a word to her son-in-law. It is really comical to see them together. She looks like a statue, the statue of Vengeance and he looks like a clown, though, mind you, he has a thick skin and knows how to carry it off."

Colleagues came up to them and shook hands. Fragments of political gossip became audible. And like the murmur of a distant sea, the rumbling of the crowd massed in front of the church, reached them, through the door, ascending to the vaulted roof and drowning the more discreetly modulated chatter of the élite of society within the church. Suddenly the head verger struck the ground three times with his halberd. The whole congregation turned round with a prolonged rustle of frocks and scraping of chairs. The young girl appeared on her father's arm in the bright light of the main doors.

She looked like a plaything, a lovely delicate white toy, her hair wreathed in orange blossoms.

For a moment she stood still on the threshold, then, as she took her first step into the nave the organ thundered forth a joyous welcome to the bride-to-be.

She came forward, her head bowed, not exactly timidly but vaguely startled, gentle, altogether charming, a tiny bride in miniature. The women smiled and murmured admiringly as she passed. The men said approvingly. "Exquisite, adorable!"

M Walter walked, or rather, marched along with ponderous, exaggerated dignity, his spectacles firmly planted on his nose.

Behind them, four bridesmaids, all in pink and all remark-

ably pretty formed a court for this little gem of a queen. Their male escorts, carefully chosen and conforming to type, strode along with regular automatic gait, as if they were under the baton of a ballet master.

Mme Walter came next, giving her arm to the Marquis de Latour-Yvelin, father of her other son-in-law, an aged nobleman of seventy-two. She was dragging herself along, rather than walking, nearly collapsing at each step forward. Her feet seemed glued to the ground, her limbs to refuse their function, her heart to beat within her breast like an animal striving to break free.

She had become quite thin and her grey hair sharply emphasized her sallow haggard face. She stared before her seeing no one, thinking of nothing except, perhaps what was torturing her.

Then came Georges du Roy with an unknown old lady.

He held his head high, looking straight ahead with hard level eyes under somewhat anxious brows. Everyone voted him a fine handsome man. He had an arrogant allure, a well knit figure and a shapely limb. There was a small stain on his coat like a drop of blood. It was the crimson ribbon of the Legion of Honour.

The relations followed. Rose with Senator Rissolin. She had been married six weeks. The Count de Latour-Yvelin with the Viscountess de Percemur. Finally, an odd procession of associates and friends of du Roy whom he had introduced into his new family, people well known in the between-world of Paris, the usual hangers-on of wealthy upstarts, déclassé aristocrats impoverished, shady, disgraced. M de Velvigue, the Marquis de Banjolin, the Count and Countess de Ravenel, the duke of Ramorano, the prince of Kravallow, the chevalier Valréali; then the guests of the Walters, the prince of Guerche, the duke and duchess de Ferracine, the lovely Marquise des Dunes. Some of Mme Walter's relations gave a provincial touch to this essentially metropolitan parade.

And all the time the mighty organ rolled, pouring forth those majestic notes which cry to heaven the joy or sorrow of mankind. Suddenly the chords trembled away into silence.

Now, Georges was kneeling by Suzanne's side in the choir, before the lighted altar. The new bishop of Tangier, mitred, pastoral staff in hand, emerged from the sacristy to unite them in the name of the Eternal. He put to them the customary questions, exchanged rings, pronounced the words which tied them together as in chains and then delivered to the wedded couple a Christian homily. His lordship spoke of fidelity at length and in pompous terms. He was a big man with a fine figure, one of those prelates whose stomach is a thing of majesty.

The sound of sobbing caused a few heads to turn.

Mme Walter, her face in her hands, was weeping.

She had had to give in. What other alternative had she? But since the day when she had driven her daughter from her room, refusing her embrace, since the day when she had said with slow emphasis to du Roy, greeting her with ceremonial punctiliousness when he presented himself to her again: "You are the vilest creature existing. Never speak to me again for I shall not reply," she had suffered unbearable, unappeasable torture. She detested Suzanne with piercing hatred made up of thwarted passion and devouring jealousy, a strange wild jealousy of mother and mistress, unavowable, ferocious, burning like an open wound.

And now, before her eyes a bishop was marrying these two, her own daughter and her lover in the presence of two thousand witnesses! And she could not say a word or do a thing to hinder it! She could not cry out: "But this man is mine, he is my lover. This union that you are blessing is unnatural and infamous!"

Some of the women noticed her and were touched: "How grieved her poor mother is to lose her!"

The bishop proclaimed sonorously: "You are of the happy ones of this earth, the wealthiest, the most respected. You, monsieur, whom your talent has raised above the majority, are a writer who instructs, counsels, warns and directs the common people, you have before you an honourable mission to fulfil, a sterling example to set to others."

Du Roy listened to it all eagerly. A prelate of the Roman

Church was speaking thus to him. Behind him, he sensed a vast congregation, an illustrious assembly gathered there to do him honour. It seemed to him as if a mighty force was pushing him forward and sustaining him. He had become one of the masters of the earth, he, he, the son of two poor peasants of Canteleu. He could see them now in their humble inn on the crest of the hill, overlooking the broad valley of Rouen, entertaining their rustic friends. He had sent them five thousand francs from the Count de Vaudrec's money; and now he was going to send them another fifty thousand. They would buy a little homestead and would live in quiet contentment and happiness.

The bishop had concluded his homily. A priest, resplendent in vestments and coloured stole, ascended to the altar; and the organ pealed again, in joyous greeting to bride and bridegroom.

The clamorous triumphant chords died down with startling suddenness and in their stead, a wistful plaintive melody stole through the air, gently touching the ear, like the caress of the faintest breeze, tiny quivering tender notes akin to the fluttering of birds; then crashing out again, majestic, almost terrifying in volume and strength, shaking the whole edifice, sending an involuntary shudder through body and mind. Human voices took up the refrain, over the bowed heads of the congregation, those of Vauri and Landeck of the Opera. The smell of incense spread through the church, as upon the altar the Divine sacrifice was being accomplished. God, at the call of His priest, descended to earth to sanctify the triumph of Baron Georges du Roy.

Bel-Ami was on his knees by Suzanne's side, with bowed head. At that moment, he felt himself almost believing, almost religious, full of gratitude to that divinity whose especial favourite he was and who looked after his welfare; and without having any definite idea whom he was addressing, he sent forth thanks for his success.

The service over, he rose and, giving his wife his arm, went into the vestry. Then began the interminable procession of guests.

Georges, quite carried away with pride and happiness, fancied himself a king responding to the acclamation of his subjects. He shook hands with everyone, murmuring meaningless words, replying to compliments and good wishes: "It is very kind of you."

Suddenly he noticed Mme de Marelle; and the remembrance of all the kisses he had given her, of her reciprocation of them, of all their caresses, of her fascination, the sound of her voice, the taste of her lips, filled him with violent desire to take her again.

She was so pretty and graceful with her tomboy air and merry eyes. He thought: "What a charming mistress she was."

She approached a little shy and uneasy, and held out her hand. He took it in his own and retained it.

He felt the discreet appeal of feminine fingers, the gentle pressure which forgave and understood. And he too, pressed the little hand as if saying, "I love you always. I belong to you!"

Their eyes met, smiling, shining, full of love. She murmured in her soft gracious voice: "Au revoir, Monsieur;" and he answered happily:

"Au revoir, Madame."

Others gathered round. The crowd flowed about him like a river. At last it broke up. Georges took Suzanne's arm again to pass through the church. It was quite full, the guests having resumed their seats to see the bride and bridegroom leave together. Du Roy walked slowly, calmly, head erect, his eyes fixed on the sunlit street outside. Triumph surged through him, the triumph of overwhelming good fortune. He saw no one. He thought only of himself.


Outside the main door, his eyes fell on the massed noisy crowd assembled there for him, for him Georges du Roy. The people of Paris looked on him and envied him.

Raising his eyes he saw, facing him, behind the Place de la Concorde, the Chamber of Deputies. And it seemed to him that at one bound he was going to leap from the portico of la Madeleine to that of the Bourbon Palace.

B E L - A M I

He walked slowly down the stone-steps, between two rows of spectators. But he did not see them; his thoughts were in the past and before his eyes, dazzled by the radiant sun, danced the image of Mme de Marelle, smoothing before the mirror the short crisp hair at his temples, always so untidy when rising from bed.

THE END



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